

PILGRIM WALKS
IN FRANCISCAN ITALY






THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

GIFT OF

WILLIAM A. NITZE



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

PILGRIM WALKS IN
FRANCISCAN ITALY



PILGRIM WALKS IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

BY JOHANNES JÖRGENSEN



SANDS & CO.

EDINBURGH: 21 HANOVER STREET

LONDON: 23 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

1908

15X
3637
J59
p

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. GRECCIO	1
II. A DAY IN THE MONASTERY	34
III. FONTE COLOMBO : LA FORESTA : A SABINE FESTIVAL	55
IV. ASSISI	112
V. CORTONA. ON THE WAY TO MOUNT ALVERNA	135
VI. THE HOLY MOUNTAIN	154

PILGRIM WALKS IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

I

GRECCIO

DURING the winter of 1904 I had frequently looked northward with a pilgrim's yearning to the Galilee of St Francis—Umbria, Tuscany, the March of Ancona, the fairest region of fair Italy, hallowed by the footsteps of the saint, rich in historical and legendary lore. In imagination I entered the ravines of the Apennines, the solitudes of the mountain forests, where are the ancient hermitages, the secluded monasteries dating from the earliest years of

PILGRIM WALKS

the Franciscan Order. I longed to visit these and other monasteries of great antiquity beyond the hills, where all is just the same at the present day as in the days of yore—to find myself actually within the precincts of the venerable cloisters about which such wondrous stories are related.

At length, one fine day in April, I was able to fulfil my wish, to start on my travels, my primary destination being the vale of Rieti. In the same compartment with me was a priest, with whom I entered into conversation. We naturally spoke of St Francis, and of the great interest now generally taken in him and all that is closely associated with him. As the train wound its slow way up through the wild, mountainous region, my fellow-traveller directed my attention to the principal points of interest: the picturesque old towns on

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

the hillsides, whose towers and belfries stood out dark against the clear sky ; the grey feudal fortresses crowning the loftier heights.

Presently we emerged into the wide plain between the vineyards, where the verdant branches of the vines hang like festoons from tree to tree. In the far distance, above the purple hills, the crests of the snow-clad mountains were discernible, glistening in the sunshine. The train stopped ; we were in Greccio. The cool air from the mountains met us as we passed out of the small station to the highroad.

Greccio consists of three distinct parts : the new part close to the railway station ; the old town high up on the hillside ; and the ancient Franciscan monastery, San Francesco di Greccio. The town, whose windows show dark on the grey walls of the houses, amid which rises a single

PILGRIM WALKS

bell tower, is on the left side of a tolerably wide valley, which extends for a considerable way between the mountains. The monastery is on the right side of the valley, behind a thick wood of oaks and laurels.

Some account of this remarkable foundation was given to me by the priest while our ways lay together. Soon our roads parted. He went on to the town—he was attached to the church of Greccio—while I had to follow a stony path cut in the rock, which would bring me, in somewhat less than an hour, to the cloister on the height. “They have accommodation for strangers up there,” were the last words my new friend addressed to me. Well for me that it was so, for Greccio does not boast a single inn.

Then I went on my way alone. On my right rose the mountain, the blue-

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

grey stone cropping up continually through the scanty grass, Alpen violets blossoming on the slope. On my left was the cultivated campaign, where the young corn, already in the blade, formed a verdant carpet below the climbing vines. Perfect quiet prevailed all around—such quiet as can be met with only in the open country.

But listen ! A soft sound breaks the stillness. Some one is singing out yonder. The voice is that of a child ; the song I recognise at once as one of those strangely plaintive, lingering melodies that I have often heard the Umbrian peasants sing at their work in the fields. I cannot distinguish the words, but about the tune there can be no mistake. Many a time have I heard it wafted from the olive groves in the vicinity of Assisi, on a tranquil autumn evening, when the mist begins to rise in

PILGRIM WALKS

the broad meadows; and later on, while the shades of night are falling, some solitary peasant girl, going home at the close of day, may be heard singing, in slow, measured cadence, that same sad, sweet melody.

I sat down by the wayside to rest awhile, and the past rose up vividly before me. Everything around me forcibly recalled the memory of that happy summer which, having been admitted to the true Fold after long wanderings, I spent in the mountain seclusion of Las Roccas, under Padre Felice's roof. I noticed in the air the peculiar, aromatic scent that is to be remarked in the neighbourhood of Italian farmyards—the odour of withered maize leaves strewn about the threshing floor, and of juniper branches emitting a pungent fragrance as they burned on the hearth. It told me that I could not be

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

far from some human habitation ; and on the hillside, beneath some straggling oaks, I saw several children picking up sticks. On coming up to them, I asked a little girl, with fair hair and blue eyes, the way to the monastery. In answer she turned round, and, pointing to the eminence above, said : "There it is !" There, in fact, it was, small and white, clinging to the rock, overshadowed by laurels and oaks. It was still a good way off, but the little maiden showed me a short cut through the convent vineyard and garden. I clambered over a hedge and got into the garden.

It is a large enclosure, laid out in terraces on the slope of the mountain, full of tall trees, high grass, and wild flowers, blue hyacinths and scarlet anemones. Now and again one comes on a cultivated portion, sometimes planted with vines, or a *loggia*, where

PILGRIM WALKS

lovely lilies in pots are arranged in rows on the edge of the terrace.

I mounted terrace after terrace, always ascending, yet meeting no one. And the convent still stood high overhead, apparently as inaccessible, unapproachable as ever.

Presently I heard someone call, and from behind some bushes there stepped out a sturdy, thick-set figure, with features bronzed by the sun, curly hair, and bright-looking, brown eyes. It was a Franciscan; his brown habit was confined round his waist by a thick cord, his feet were bare, and in his hand he held a spade, which he rested on the ground, while he stared in amazement at the stranger who had intruded into the convent grounds. Meanwhile, I hastened to produce the document with which the General of the Order of Friars Minor, Father David Fleming, had

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

furnished me, commending me in most eulogistic terms to the Superiors of the Order, and expressing his wish that "the bearer should everywhere be made acquainted with the sacred traditions, and every facility should be afforded him for obtaining information respecting our holy Father Francis." No sooner had the bare-footed Brother seen the armorial bearings of the Order (the two arms crossed) at the head of the paper, and read the opening words : "*Fr. David Fleming, vicarius generalis totius ordinis patrum minorum,*" than he bowed deferentially, stuck his spade in the earth, turned round and shouted : "Giuseppe ! Giuseppe !"

At his call forth came Giuseppe, a quite young Brother, of the same rather unkempt type as the other. Only his habit was more soil-stained and even torn, and his bare feet were caked with

PILGRIM WALKS

the mud which the sun had dried on them.

“Giuseppe, show this gentleman the way up to the monastery.”

Thereupon the young monk ran before me to a door in the garden-wall, a door which opened upon a long flight of stone steps, which was the proper way up to the monastery. He closed the door behind me, and I began the ascent alone.

It was a very steep ascent, the steps were zigzag, and paved with small, uneven stones. On the one side was the declivity of the mountain-side, clothed with a rich vegetation of elegant ferns and dark laurels. On the other side was a breastwork of chalk stones, commanding an extensive view of the country. As I went on ascending, the view became more and more wondrously beautiful. I leaned over

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

the wall; already the garden in which I had been lay far below, and the two Franciscans at work among the vines were dwarfed by distance. At length the steps came out on a terrace, whence I could see the whole vale of Rieti spread out below like a panorama, partitioned out into wide fields, some green, some brown, shut in by the mountain tops. The highest of these were snow-capped, and half shrouded by grey clouds.

In front of me was the entrance to the monastery, whose white walls really seemed to adhere to the rock and be suspended from it; apparently, the building was on the eve of being detached, and precipitated into the abyss. The gate was of the simplest kind. A door painted red, with a broken iron latch, led into a small anteroom with a brick floor; a low,

PILGRIM WALKS

narrow window admitted a little light ; and one saw another door which opened—or rather stood open—on to a narrow passage constructed of planks, which, at a turning, seemed to lose itself between whitewashed walls. A verse from the Book of Tobias (iv. 23) was inscribed over this second door : “Fear not, my son. We lead indeed a poor life, but we shall have many good things.” To the right of the door was a fresco painting of St Francis ; on the left, one of St Anthony—both in grey habits. Under the representation of St Anthony was a stone holy-water stoup with the date MDLXII. Close by, a latticed gate led into a chapel, over which were the words : “In this chapel, dedicated to St Luke, Francis prepared a resting-place for Christ in the crib.”

There, then, exactly at the entrance of the cloister, was the spot where

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

Christmas night was celebrated in Greccio. I gazed through the lattice, but all was dark within. After a short pause I proceeded on my way down the long corridor, the boards of which were in many places very loose. A bell-wire ran the whole length along the ceiling.

Presently I turned a corner. Over an archway there was a wooden shield with the Franciscan arms; underneath it was the word, *Silentium*. I went through into a kind of entrance hall, or vestibule, floored with wood, which is not usual in Italy, but which Francis enjoined for love of poverty. On one side, shut off by a wooden lattice, was a small chapel, with two windows looking out over the valley; on the other, a rickety staircase leading to the upper story of the monastery. The naked rock formed the background.

PILGRIM WALKS

Fronting me was a closed door which appeared to shut off the continuation of the corridor along which I had come ; and beside it was an open passage, beyond which all was pitch-darkness.

Not knowing what was before me there, I preferred to ascend the staircase. It was narrow, and so low that I had to stoop to avoid striking my head against the worm-eaten beams. I fancied I heard some one overhead, and stood still to listen ; but it was only the slow, monotonous ticking of a large clock that seemed very near. Going in the direction of the sound, I came to a narrow corridor between two rows of small rooms painted brown. These were the cells ; the doors were without locks, but a cord passing through a hole in the door afforded the means of lifting the latch which was inside. My footsteps sounded noisily in the stillness. I

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

knocked at one after another of the low doors, but no one answered.

I wandered about in this strange labyrinth of poverty and brown paint, up and down flights of stairs, through rooms so dark that I had to grope my way about in them; then out on to little balconies, in great need of repair, giving upon the valley. At last, at the very top, I reached a kind of gallery constructed against the face of the live rock, where big piles of laurel branches were stacked, and golden broom and purple juniper blossomed in the crevices of the blue-grey stone. I could go no farther: a closed door at the end of the gallery, leading into the forest, forbade further progress.

So back I went, past other odd nooks and corners, past the noisily ticking clock; finally stumbling into a small, narrow, dimly lighted church, with

PILGRIM WALKS

wooden candlesticks on the altar, and old choir stalls, blackened and shiny from long centuries of use. Through a low door I emerged thence into the open air, on to a tolerably large platform flagged with tiles. A few steps lower down was the very door by which a short time ago I entered on my visit to the monastery. So I had been all over it, and found no one at home. Disappointed and—why should I not own it?—not a little hungry, I seated myself on the doorstep. A suitable time and place, I thought, to read the eighth chapter of the “Fioretti”—the chapter about “perfect joy.”

There I sat a long time. Five o'clock came, half-past five, ten minutes to six: there was not a sound in the deserted monastery; only the wind rushing through the corridors made the doors creak. At length, far down

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

below, the two Brothers whom I saw in the garden made their appearance. Their day's work was done; they came up the flight of steps, their arms full of vegetables for supper. I pocketed the "Fioretti," and a few minutes later I was seated in the refectory, with a piece of bread and a glass of wine, which the older of the two gardeners, who was also the cook, set before me.

There I was sitting, while Brother Humilitas—so the cook was called—chatted pleasantly to me, when the Father Guardian came in from the forest, where, according to the good Franciscan custom, he had spent part of the day, not with a book of poetry, but with a volume of the works of St Leonard of Port Maurice — *The Treasure Hidden beneath the Veil of the Holy Eucharist*.

The Guardian laid his book down on

PILGRIM WALKS

the table while he examined my letters of recommendation. His physiognomy reminded one of a golden eaglet: his eye was bright, his glance keen, his complexion dark, and his hair black as ebony. Very carefully and attentively he perused the Latin sentences written by his General. All at once, while so doing, he looked up, glanced at me sharply, and, pointing to the glass before me, said with an air of command: "*Beva!*" (Drink your wine).

After I had complied with this injunction, and not declined another glass, the Father Guardian led the way to his cell. It was one of the little rooms at the door of which I had vainly knocked. It was almost incredibly small, and lighted from above; the furniture consisted literally of nothing but a table, some bookshelves, and a few rush-bottomed chairs.

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

While we were talking, the light faded quickly, and presently the evening bell rang. Father Guardian stood up. "We always go into the church at this time," he said. In the corridor outside it was pitch-dark, so that I ran up against some of the monks who were going by. Then I felt a guiding hand take mine; and, stooping our heads, we passed through a low doorway, and, by the dim light of a single oil lamp, I recognised the church where I had found myself earlier in the afternoon. With a wave of the hand, the Father Guardian showed me where to kneel, and the night prayers began.

Father Guardian knelt beside me. As my eyes gradually grew accustomed to the half-light, I descried two, three, then more figures in the stalls. On the bare floor just in front of me, a ragged Brother was kneeling with arms out-

PILGRIM WALKS

stretched and palms turned upward. I glanced stealthily at the others, and saw that several had their arms extended in a similar manner. Later on, when I was at Mount Alverna, I learned why this attitude in prayer is peculiar to the Franciscan Order.

The profound silence was broken by the Father Guardian's voice beginning the prayers, all of which were in Latin.

“*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus noster omnipotens, qui est, et qui erat, et qui venturus est.*”—“Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.”

And the Brothers responded :

“*Et laudemus et superexaltemus eum in sæcula.*”—“Let us praise and magnify Him forever.”

Father Guardian : “Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power and benediction.”

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

The Brothers: "Let us praise and magnify Him forever."

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and divinity and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and benediction."

The others responded as before; and for some time they continued this antiphonal chant, which was enjoined by St Francis. It ended with the usual Doxology, but with the same interpolation:

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.

Laudemus et superexaltemus eum in sæcula.

Sicut erat in principio, et nunc et semper, et in sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

Laudemus et superexaltemus . . .

Thereupon followed the prayers—first the beautiful prayer which St Francis wrote two years before his death:

PILGRIM WALKS

“Almighty, most holy, most high God, the supreme and only Good, to Thee we give all praise and honour and glory. We bless Thee and give thanks to Thee for all that Thou hast bestowed on us. Thou art the God of gods, who alone doest wonders. Thou art the triune, the one only God, the Lord of lords, the living and true God. Thou art our hope, our justice, all our riches. Thou art our protector, our defender, our guardian, our refuge, and our strength. Thou art infinite goodness, the great and marvellous Lord God, almighty, gracious, merciful, and our Redeemer.

“Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, grant that we, Thy poor servants, may always do that which we know to be Thy will, and always will that which is pleasing in Thy sight ; so that, purified and enlightened and kindled by the fire

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

of Thy Holy Spirit, we may follow in the footprints of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and, by Thy grace, may finally behold Thee in that blessed country where Thou, O Most High, livest and reignest, and art adored, God Almighty, forever and ever. Amen.”

That is the evening oblation which St Francis taught to his disciples. After it came the long Rosary in honour of the Seven Joys of Our Lady. A short pause ensued; then I heard the rattle of matches in a box: a lantern was lighted; and in the bright flame, all that I had before seen but dimly now stood out in relief against the darkness. By the light of the lantern, one of the Fathers read a portion of a spiritual book in the monotonous, level tone prescribed by monastic rule for such readings; the subject was the necessity

PILGRIM WALKS

of meditation on the four last things : death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Then the light was extinguished, and mental prayer followed.

I think I may say that in the course of my life I have met with much that was out of the common and affecting, yet scarcely ever with anything that impressed me so profoundly as those minutes of perfect silence among the Franciscans of Greccio. As I knelt amid those barefooted, brown-habited friars, who in the darkness raised their hands and their hearts to Heaven in voiceless prayer, I realised more vividly than ever I did before what the Middle Ages were — how far removed the twentieth century was ; how far away beyond the crest of the mountains was the modern world ; how remote seemed the great, busy towns, with their glare and their noise, their unrest, their end-

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

less round of amusements. Nothing then seemed real to me but that humble little chapel of the poor, primitive monastery, where the sons of St Francis prayed, gave thanks and offered praise to the God for whom the votaries of the world had scarcely a passing thought.

How long this profound silence, this absorption in prayer, may have lasted I know not. Now and again some one made a slight movement, or sighed. Presently footsteps were heard: one of the Brothers rose and left the choir. Shortly after, the monastery bell rang out, echoing over the tranquil valley for the last time that evening. It rang what in ancient times was the curfew bell—the signal that all lights were to be put out, and the fires covered until the next morning.

As the last stroke of the bell died

PILGRIM WALKS

away, a hand took mine as before. Soon we were all assembled in the refectory, where the flame of a common, unshaded petroleum lamp seemed to pierce one's eyes. Before we sat down to table, the Father Guardian introduced me to the two young Fathers whom I had seen in the choir.

After supper there were a few prayers in the chapel, then away we went to the common room, where there was a fire. Although it was April, the weather was very cold, and in Greccio it was necessary to warm oneself before going to bed. So we all gathered in a semicircle—some sitting, some standing—round the large, open fireplace, while Fra Giuseppe piled great logs on the andirons.

“That young fellow is clever at lighting fires,” said Brother Humilitas, approvingly.

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

Colouring with pleasure and with the exertion he had been making, Fra Giuseppe then struck a lucifer match—one of the old-fashioned ones, smelling of brimstone, that were in use half a century ago—and soon a great fire of laurel branches flared and blazed under the logs. Our shadows, of gigantic size, danced on the walls and ceiling in the fitful firelight.

Last of the row stood the Father Guardian, staring with eagle gaze into the fire, and holding out his hands to get them thoroughly warm. Beside me on the narrow bench sat Fra Secondo, gentle, quiet, and serene, accustomed, as his name implies, never to be first, but always to sit modestly in a corner. Yet only begin to talk to him and you will soon perceive that few are so well acquainted with the life of St Francis, or so conversant with

PILGRIM WALKS

the history of the Franciscan Order, as old Fra Secondo.

“Here we sit,” I said to him, “enjoying the company of Brother Fire, who is beauteous and merry and mighty and strong, and who illumines the night.”

“Yes,” he answered, and his eyes smiled under his shaggy white eyebrows. “Brother Fire was the element which our Father Francis loved best of all. In fact, our Father treated fire so tenderly that he would not permit the Brothers to throw a burning wick on the ground, as one often does, to tread it out; he always would have them lay it down reverently, because fire is our brother, created by the same God as we are.”

“We are not so pious,” Father Chrysostom observed, as he flicked a spark off his sleeve.

“No,” said Father Silverio, with a

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

smile. "But, then, fire has not the same respect for us that it had for St Francis. You know what happened when he was living over there in Fonte Colombo—which you" (here he turned to me) "will doubtless visit in the course of your pilgrimage. His eyes were then so dim by reason of the many tears he shed for his sins that he could scarcely see. Brother Elias who was General of the Order, and Cardinal Ugolino, got one of the physicians attached to the Papal Court to visit St Francis. After examining his eyes, the physician said he must apply a red-hot iron above the eye more seriously affected. So they brought a brasier filled with live coals, and the iron was put in to be heated. The doctor's assistant stood by with a bellows to blow the fire, and soon the instrument was as red as a cherry.

PILGRIM WALKS

“But before the operation took place, St Francis went up to the fire and addressed it, saying: ‘Brother Fire, thou art nobler and more useful than most created things. See, I have always been fond of thee, and I always will be, for love of Him who created thee. Now show thyself gentle and kind toward me, and do not burn me more severely than I can bear.’ And he made the Sign of the Cross over the red-hot iron. Then the physician applied the iron, and the Brothers fled away, horrified. Francis himself, however, did not speak a single word or utter a cry. And when the operation was over, he said to the physician: ‘If it is not sufficiently burned, sear it afresh: for I did not feel the slightest pain.’”

Such was Father Silverio’s tale. The Father Guardian said nothing; he only

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

smiled as he stood there holding out his hands to the fire. But it was time for our séance to break up. Fra Giuseppe began to rake together the red-hot coals for a warming-pan, which, as was afterward proved, was destined for my bed. With many reciprocal good wishes, we parted.

Soon I was alone in the guest chamber, the best cell in the monastery. It is large enough to afford space for a good-sized bed, a prie-dieu, and a small iron wash-stand, with a modest set of earthenware. In the white-washed walls are two cupboards; the larger one is a wardrobe; in the other I bestow my small amount of luggage. The cell itself is not more than five feet in length and the same in width.

I open the window, the shutters of which are inside, and lean out of the narrow aperture, that is scarcely more

PILGRIM WALKS

than a loophole. Opposite to me are the mountains; the plain stretches out below. There are a few stars in the sky. I hear the sound of the stream in the valley, and the distant croaking of frogs.

Leaving the window open, I draw back within the four walls of the room, which is lighted by a tall candle in a brass candlestick on the prie-dieu. A picture hangs over the bed; a crucifix is over the prie-dieu; beside the door there is a holy-water font; otherwise the walls are bare. Yet in this simple chamber I feel as happy and comfortable as I have seldom felt in any other place in the wide world.

On taking out my watch to wind it up, I find the hands point only to half-past nine. I put the watch down on the prie-dieu at the head of the bed, and proceed to undress leisurely, with that

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

feeling of content which one might have on returning to the home of one's childhood after a long absence, and again inhabiting the room where one slept as a boy. I leave the window open and put out the light. And in my dreams there mingles the noise of the brook rushing down the hillside, and the croaking of the frogs in the distant meadows.

II

A DAY IN THE MONASTERY

I WAS awake the next morning at a little before six o'clock. There was a knock at the door, and a voice said: "*E tempo di Messa!*" (It is time for Mass.) I heard the birds twittering outside the window; and, on looking at my bed, I saw that the counterpane was covered with cotton of a yellow flowery pattern,—what excessive elegance! The room itself was floored with flagstones, not with boards, like the rest of the monastery.

I began to dress; but in a few moments the cook, who had called me, came back and said: "Signor Giovanni, the Mass is beginning." I

PILGRIM WALKS

hastily thrust my arms into my coat and hurried to the door, which Brother Humilitas pointed out to me. I found that my room was very near the church; I did not notice that the evening before. I had only to go through the little library; close to the library door was the entrance to the church—to that section of it at least which was in front of the altar; the choir, where prayers were said the previous evening, was behind it.

I entered. Father Silverio was standing before the altar. Brother Secondo was kneeling in one of the ancient stalls. Behind the choir screen, some of the gay handkerchiefs which Italian peasant women are wont to wear on their heads were dimly discernible in the half-light. After the priest's Communion, two of the peasant girls came forward to receive Holy Communion;

PILGRIM WALKS

they remained for a long time kneeling on the lowest step of the altar, motionless, in an attitude of recollection and devotion; not a shadow of change passed over their strongly marked, regular features.

On returning to my room, I opened the window which Brother Humilitas had shut when he came to tidy the apartment. The wind blew in cold; the sky was overcast; heavy clouds hung over the lofty mountains, whose grey flanks were planted with olive trees and vines, leafless as yet. The town of Greccio lay far off on the other side of the valley. Walking along the road which led thither, I could see three brown-clad figures; they were the three Fathers on their way to the village, where someone had died during the night.

In the refectory a cup of black coffee

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

was served to me, with some slices of toast. Brother Humilitas, who waited on me, in his haste accidentally let the bread fall to the ground. On putting it away, he kissed it, as if to ask its forgiveness. Later on I noticed that before every meal the young novices always kissed the piece of bread which was placed under their serviette. This reverence for our daily bread, and indeed for all that appertains to our earthly existence, or promotes or benefits life, is truly Franciscan. The spirit of the Order is essentially one of reverence; the veneration and love due to God is extended to all His creatures for His sake.

I soon left the refectory and adjourned to the library, next to my bed-chamber. There in simple presses, behind wire netting, were hundreds of volumes, both Latin and Italian, bound

PILGRIM WALKS

in parchment. I took down several of them, amongst others a small, beautifully printed collection of St Bonaventure's lesser writings. I opened it at random, and read an edifying description of "The Different Grades and Works of Humility."

After replacing the little volume in the press, I went again to the window. The clouds had come down on the grey mountains, and would soon hide the town of Greccio from view. The country looked bare and deserted; no one was to be seen save a solitary peasant down in the valley, walking slowly along under a huge green umbrella. The fog was quite dense outside the window where I was standing. Not a sound was to be heard except the heavy downpour of the rain. I was a prisoner in my monastic solitude.

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

I looked at my watch ; it was only half-past nine. It was cold in my room, so I put on my overcoat and began to walk up and down. But there was no space to move about in the narrow apartment ; and finally, with ice-cold feet and benumbed fingers, I seated myself in front of the small, rickety writing-table in the library. Before me various books and pamphlets were lying ; among them was one which excited my interest—a work by Padre Benedetto Spila, entitled, *The Reformed Franciscan Monasteries in the Roman Province.*

By reform in the Franciscan Order, a reform of discipline, not of doctrine, is, of course, to be understood. Each century has witnessed such reforms, necessitated by the constant propensity of fallen man to fix a lower standard

PILGRIM WALKS

for himself. Even during the lifetime of St Francis there were some of his younger disciples who desired the austerity of the Rule to be relaxed, particularly in respect to the strict evangelical poverty which the Saint required his followers to observe. After his death the Order was divided into two camps: the Conventuals, or relaxed; and the Spirituals, or the monks of the strict observance. These latter rallied round the senior friars—the *compagni* of the Saint—and most of all round Brother Leo, the confessor, secretary, confidant and intimate friend of Francis, the living fount of pure and genuine Franciscan traditions; and to them, at their petition, were handed over the oldest and poorest houses of the Order—*loca paupercula, nec minus devota*—poor little places, but for that none

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

the less sacred. Life here at Greccio is restricted to the simplest wants; there is little to mark the days as they pass: prayer, work, such refreshment of the body as is absolutely necessary—this is all, besides the pure, quiet happiness of living together in brotherly love; or, as an old Franciscan writer expresses it, “through Francis to be one in Christ.”

Several hours passed quickly by whilst I was studying Padre Spila's book. One has abundance of time for work in a religious house: first, the long morning and forenoon, from eight o'clock, when one has had coffee, until a quarter to twelve, when the bell rings for prayers in the choir and afterwards for the midday meal; then the whole afternoon, until the Angelus rings at about a quarter-past seven, when all assemble for prayers in the

PILGRIM WALKS

church. And after supper, and recreation in the common room, there is still time that can be made use of before going to bed. No wonder, then, that voluminous works like those of the Benedictine monks, or the *Annals of the Friar's Minor*, have been compiled in the cloister.

After dinner I lay down to sleep awhile. A siesta forms part of the daily routine of a well-ordered monastery. Moreover, the weather was still inclement and rough; the wind had risen and was driving the rain in sheets across the deserted plain. Towering above the cultivated mountain-sides, clothed with verdant fields, still leafless oaks, and poplars in their fresh young green, the naked mountain-ridge rose bleak and grey, washed clean by heavy rains and furrowed by many a small watercourse.

On awaking from my midday slumber,

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

I found that the rain had ceased. It had made a vast lake of the meadows in the valley. There were now gleams of bright sunshine, which gilded the distant towers of Rieti or illumined the reddish-brown hills that shut in the valley on the south.

I left my room and went into the chapel, where I found Brother Secondo on his knees, with a cat reposing at his feet. The cat purred contentedly, while Fra Secondo occasionally whispered a word to her.

I slipped out again noiselessly, and stepped on to the terrace before the chapel. Going down a few steps, I came to the little chapel erected on the spot where the Crib once stood. It was so dark inside that at first I could see nothing; but when my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I perceived that I was in a small, vaulted room, and

PILGRIM WALKS

that facing the door, and close to it, was an altar, above which was a Madonna of fourteenth-century work, with the Divine Child and St Joseph. To the left, in the darkest corner of all, was a highly interesting fresco, representing the Christmas night in Greccio when, at St Francis' desire, Our Lord's Nativity was solemnly celebrated in the forest in as realistic a manner as possible, in the presence of a great crowd of devout worshippers. I examined the fresco closely by the light of a candle, and was much charmed with the countenance of the Saint; the happy smile, the almost lamb-like expression resting on it, agrees well with what Thomas of Celano says in the familiar legend.

Another work of art, still more remarkable than the fresco, is preserved in the monastery of Greccio. It is a

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

portrait of St Francis painted in his lifetime, by command of the Lady Giacomina dei Settecoli. The Father Guardian took me to see it. It is placed above the altar of a small chapel opening out of the entrance hall of the monastery, and concealed by a curtain. The figure of the Saint is short and slight, the countenance emaciated and worn; all the stigmata are plainly marked, excepting that of the left hand, which holds a handkerchief to the face. In this same chapel are preserved a few relics of St Francis. A small devotional picture, which he was in the habit of carrying about with him, is interesting as testifying to his love for the Christmas festival. It is an enamel painting of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph adoring the new-born infant Jesus. Beside it stands a small, extremely simple brass crucifix, as well as two equally unpre-

PILGRIM WALKS

tentious brass candlesticks which were used whenever Brother Leo, or any other priest of the order, said Mass for Brother Francis.

While visiting the curiosities of the monastery, the Father Guardian took me to the cell formerly inhabited by the Saint—a room now perfectly dark, a wall having been built before it; originally it was a cavern in the rock. In order to give me a better idea of what the cell was, my guide led me up above the convent, through a narrow path that ran along the face of the rock. There he opened a trapdoor in the ground, gathered his brown habit closely round him, and descended some rough steps hewn in the live rock. I followed him, and we found ourselves standing in the cave where Blessed John of Parma shut himself up for thirty-two years, to pray, fast, and do

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

penance. It is a kind of gigantic, cup-like shell, formed by Nature's hand, set upright and built into the rock. It is not high enough for a man to stand up in, and how any one could contrive to sleep there is incomprehensible, as it would be impossible to stretch oneself out in it. Seeing this grotto, I understood why Giotto always represents the disciples of St Francis in such strange postures when sleeping — crouched down, their back bent, their knees drawn up. May we not conclude that the artist, himself a Franciscan Tertiary, visited these lowly hermitages, and carefully observed the manner of life of those brethren who kept up the traditions of the heroic age of the Order?

In front of the cell, on a projection of the rock, stands a tiny chapel, or rather a short, narrow, open portico, with an altar at one end and a stone

PILGRIM WALKS

bench at the other, and above a scanty roof resting on wooden pillars. From this spot one has a most magnificent and extensive view over the vale of Rieti. At the moment of which I speak, it was wrapped in a light, warm haze of ethereal blue. There, at that altar, Father Pacifico told me, Blessed John of Parma said Mass daily. A lay-brother used to come down to minister to him. One day when the brother failed to make his appearance, an angel took his place, and served the Mass.

At my request, Father Pacifico left me alone in the tiny chapel. A bit of wall with a low door in it shuts it off from the grotto, into which I returned, to gaze once more with amazement and almost horror at the bare, rugged rock which for thirty-two years formed the bed of the sainted friar. And when I

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

emerged again into the light—that wondrous light wherein the setting sun of Italy bathes mountain and valley—I tried to realise what was the life led by Blessed John, and many other solitaries both in earlier and later times.

That very morning, while it was raining, my time had hung heavy on my hands, and I had thought it a grievance to sit shut up in a small, unheated room, and read hour after hour, shivering with cold. How should I have relished being, not in the sheltered cell of a convent, surrounded by books, but in an open grotto, exposed to the rage of the elements, myself barefoot, clad in a tattered habit, my library consisting of a Breviary and a crucifix? And, then, to live there not for a few days or weeks but year after year, for a whole lifetime! It is almost impossible for the ordinary Christian to imagine a life

PILGRIM WALKS

of such self-mortification, such extraordinary fervour.

While we were sitting round the fire on the evening of that day, Father Pacifico brought in a relic which I had heard was in his possession : the much talked of iron for making Hosts which St Francis gave to the monastery of Greccio. It consists of two round plates of iron, somewhat resembling tongs, with a long handle on each side, and is considered a curiosity as well as a precious relic of the Saint. It was passed from hand to hand as we sat there, and I closely examined the stamp on one of the two circular plates. The design on the upper surface of the altar breads is now usually either a crucifix, an *Agnus Dei*, or the monogram I. H. S. But neither of these is on this thirteenth-century mould : only flourishes and some letters, which none of those

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

present seemed able to explain. So far as I could discern in the fitful firelight, the letters appeared to be the first three letters of the name of Jesus in Greek—I. H. C.—the bar of the H having been omitted, it would seem, for the sake of the ornamental flourishes.

My time at Greccio was now almost at an end. I had been there three days, and on the morrow I must move on. The evening meal was finished, and we had been in the chapel to give thanks. Before supper I heard for the last time the cheery voices of the three Fathers call to me across the table, after the friendly Franciscan custom: "*Buona sera, Signor Giovanni, e buon appetito!*" And while in the chapel I heard for the last time the curfew bell ring out over the valley—the bell whose iron tongue was afterward silent until it rang out next morning to call us to the early Mass.

PILGRIM WALKS

This was the last evening that Fra Giuseppe would shovel up the glowing embers from the hearth for my warming-pan ; and I fancied he conducted me to my room and brought me hot water more ceremoniously than before. Then he went away ; and I opened my window as on my first night at Greccio, and leaned out. No stars were to be seen : all was shrouded in darkness ; only in the far distance I could discern a glimpse of the electric light in Rieti.

On the following morning I was awakened by the sound of the bell ringing for first Mass. It was a quarter past five: I rose at once. It had rained during the night, but the clouds were clearing off ; the sun shone brightly over the verdant plain below, and the birds were singing in the convent garden. Through the library, the door of which Fra Giuseppe must

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

have left open the night before, the Father Guardian's voice reached my ear: "*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*" I hastened into the chapel.

After Mass I bade farewell to my little room, to the library, and to the lovely view of the town of Rieti and the undulating hills beyond, seen from its two small windows. The Father Guardian came to the refectory to say good-bye, and I took leave of Brother Humilitas. I did not see the others. Then down I regretfully went by the same steps, on the same path up which I had come only three days before—could it possibly not have been longer ago! On my way I met peasants going up to hear Mass—boys and young men, with handsome, innocent-looking faces, clear olive complexions, black eyes and hair; sturdy, well-set-up, well-mannered young fellows. I could

PILGRIM WALKS

not help thinking it would be no bad exchange for me were I as good a man, as good a Catholic as these simple sons of the soil.

Presently I came down into the valley, past the spring where the women were washing linen three days ago. Again and again I turned to look back at the monastery, at its olive-tinted walls, and the new part which is white. At last, as I got farther down the ravine, it disappeared behind the wood of oak and laurel. Out beyond in the wide plain the rain of last night had left big expanses of water; their surface gleamed like burnished silver. The air began to feel warm. I had to quicken my pace in order to reach Rieti in time for the train. As I went on I heard once more from afar the strangely solemn sound of the Greccio bells.

III

FONTE COLOMBO : LA FORESTA : A SABINE FESTIVAL

IN the afternoon of the day on which my visit to Greccio ended, I started on a fresh pilgrimage, my destination being the monastery of Monte, or Fonte Colombo. The mountain was originally known as Monte Rainerio, on account of the many clear, cold springs that take their rise there; but St Francis, foreseeing that a great number of his sons would draw water from those springs, called the place Fons Columbarum (Fount of Doves); and the monastery he founded there bears that name to this day.

It was two o'clock when I passed

PILGRIM WALKS

out of the Porta Romana, in Rieti. At a short distance from the town I turned off to the right, following a road which led me first along the foot of high, barren, precipitous limestone rocks; then upward, over wooded heights, where blue anemones and purple violets grew in profusion between the tree trunks. I asked my way of different people, and gradually got higher up among the mountains. Soon I left hamlets and fields behind me. The way led over a barren space of pebbles and flint stones, and over wide, rough, rugged places; tiny rivulets, clear as crystal, welled out of the ground. The narrow, stony path ran along the verge of a deep gorge, at the bottom of which a mountain stream, swollen by the rain, was rushing noisily. On the other side of the gorge rose another mountain, clothed

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

with forest; on its summit were buildings and a small bell tower. It was Fonte Colombo.

I walked on, following the path mechanically. The whole mountain overflowed now with clear, trickling streams. There was nothing for it but to wade through them. This was in very truth a mount of springs—Fonte Colombo!

I paused a moment and looked back. From the crest which I had reached I could see, far down below, the lesser crags, the verdure-clad plain intersected by white roads, the grey towers of Rieti; and behind Rieti, the lofty Abruzzi, partly shrouded in indigo-coloured clouds, partly glinting in sharply defined sunbeams. In the vast solitude, not a sound was to be heard except the gurgling of the stream at the foot of the declivity.

PILGRIM WALKS

The road descended all the way to that stream, and then ascended again on the other side. A flight of steps cut in the mountain-side somewhat facilitated the last steep ascent; and, after having walked continuously for two hours, I at last found myself standing before the convent, on a wide green space hedged round with box, in the centre of which was a wooden cross painted red—the Franciscan cross, such as one always sees in front of the houses of the Grey Friars.

I stood still for a few minutes to take breath and look about me. At the left of the monastery I descried a closed gate, which apparently takes to the rear of the building; over it is a Latin inscription—the words which Jehovah spoke to Moses out of the burning bush: “Put off the shoes

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

from thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The impression made by the sight of these words was so forcible, so solemn, in the midst of this wild, desolate solitude, high up between the vast mountains, that I felt as if I must obey the command. Those who have travelled in mountainous regions will understand me; for there is something about the grandeur of the mountains which impresses one with a sense of the majesty and greatness of God more strongly than anything else in nature. No wonder that Francis of Assisi returned ever and anon to the mountain solitudes, to hold converse with the Almighty.

I had ample leisure to make these reflections; for although I rang the monastery bell repeatedly, I could not gain admittance. The Brothers must

PILGRIM WALKS

surely have been taking their siesta. At length, however, I heard the familiar sound of the wooden sandals on the flagstones. I rang again—rang loudly. In a few minutes I was seated in the refectory, taking some refreshment which the vivacious, smiling, young Father Guardian, Padre Giovanni da Greccio, offered me.

As soon as I had appeased my hunger, the Father Guardian proposed that we should visit the Sanctuarius, the hallowed spot where Francis prayed, fasted, and wrote the Rule. We passed through the door over which I had seen the inscription; a narrow path led alongside the monastery walk, on which the Stations of the Cross were erected; on the side overlooking the declivity, the path is protected by a low parapet.

We stopped first at a small Gothic

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

chapel, said to be the oratory dedicated in honour of the Blessed Virgin, mentioned in the old chronicle; within it are the remains of some fresco paintings. We then descended, by some zigzag steps, to the hallowed spot itself. The steep rock hangs over the abyss. On a level with the tops of the trees—evergreen oaks, elms, and maples—which grow in the chasm below, are the entrances to two grottoes (the one inhabited formerly by Brother Leo, the other by St Francis), which reach into the interior of the rock.

A wooden balcony projecting over the abyss leads into St Francis' hermitage. First comes a small chapel, one side of which is the live rock. A strong stone wall of rough masonry protects the narrow ledge of rock which constituted the Saint's sleeping-place. A trapdoor in the ground

PILGRIM WALKS

conducts down to his oratory—his most private, secret chamber. It is simply a chasm in the rock, open at both ends, and so narrow that one touches both walls at every movement.

The farther end opens out upon the valley; the declivity is abrupt and precipitous, till the mountain-side is lost to sight in the depths of the forest below. Almost involuntarily one keeps still in this place, the solemn silence of the solitude is so impressive. We stood there motionless for some time. Outside, the wind roared in the forest; one heard the river rushing below, and the splash of the falling rain—the same three voices which Francis heard during the nights and days he spent there in solitary prayer, nearly seven hundred years ago.

We ascended again to the convent, and the Father Guardian locked the

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

door through which we passed. Pointing to the words above it, he said with a smile: "Pope Sixtus IV. obeyed that admonition literally. He was a Franciscan himself, so to go barefoot was no novelty to him."

Our visit to the grottoes in the rock took rather a long time; the afternoon sun, nearing the horizon, poured its golden light on the space before the house. Two white goats were feeding there; one of them went up to the Father Guardian, bleating gently, to be caressed.

After night prayers and supper, I took my seat with the four Fathers of the monastery for the accustomed hour of recreation. It seems not to be the custom here, as at Greccio, to assemble round the fire, but in the Father Guardian's cell. It was a good-sized room, and there was space for us all.

PILGRIM WALKS

The monastery of Fonte Colombo is on a much a larger scale than that of Greccio ; for it is one of the novitiates of the Order. I saw the novices while we were at supper, sitting by the old brown walls of the refectory, in two long rows, their eyes piously cast down. What nice faces they had ! I looked at them well as they passed out, two and two together, close to where I was sitting. What youthful purity and innocence !

The evening passed in conversation with the Fathers. When ten o'clock struck, I was alone in my room. It was a dark night ; white, lustreless clouds hung over the mountains. Not a sound was heard but the gurgle of the stream in the ravine below.

Part of the following morning was passed indoors, studying one of the vellum-bound books in which Sabatier

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

writes of the "Poverello," the Poor Man of Assisi. Later on, I was out of doors, under the fairest of skies enjoying the bright sunshine, watching the shadows of the clouds as they flitted over the limestone rocks, deepening the already dark shades of the woods on the mountain-side—the only sombre spots in the landscape. In the far distance, I could descry the belfry of the town of Greccio; and yet farther away, the white walls of its solitary monastery. Meanwhile I was sitting with my back against a huge block of moss-grown rock. About me forget-me-nots and anemones rose out of the moss and turf. On the summits of the mountains was the glitter of freshly fallen snow, yet where I was sitting the sun was almost hot.

In the afternoon I again visited St Francis' Grotto in the company of all

PILGRIM WALKS

the inmates of the monastery. It was Saturday, and it is the custom at Fonte Colombo on that day, shortly before sunset, to commemorate "the passing away of St Francis."

In remembrance of his last hour, we all—old and young, Fathers and novices, lay-brothers, and myself, a stranger—went from the church to the little chapel over St Francis' rocky cell. Two and two the long line of brown-habited figures filed along the path beside the monastery wall, and descended the long flight of steps. The Father Guardian was immediately in front of me; with his clear, powerful voice he led the singing, which was taken up by the strong young voices. The melody was a peculiar one—at the same time mournful and jubilant. The Latin words were very simple.

At length we reached the sanctuary.

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

It was completely filled, as was also the wooden gallery before it. Everyone knelt. Presently, amid dead silence, while the wind whispered in the tops of the trees in the glen below, the Father Guardian raised his voice, pronouncing every word distinctly and carefully, as if no syllable must be lost: "*Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi.*" It was the same psalm that Francis recited on his deathbed. The Brothers responded, reciting the verses alternately with the Guardian. After the last verse. "*Me expectant justii,*" solemn, impressive silence again prevailed, until the voices of all present joined in chanting the beautiful antiphon in honour of St Francis:

"Hail, holy Father, light of thy country, pattern of the Friars Minor, mirror of virtue, path of justice, rule of life, lead us from the exile

PILGRIM WALKS

of the body unto the kingdom of heaven !”

Then the procession filed back to the church, in the tranquil eventide, up the steps, alongside the wall, across the greensward, the whole scene flooded with the golden radiance of the setting sun. In the twilight of the church, where all knelt, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin was sung, concluding with the hymn of praise which long centuries ago the Franciscans were wont to recite in honour of the Immaculate Mother of God :

“ *Tota pulchra es, Maria,*” chanted the deep voices from one side of the choir.

“ *Tota pulchra es, Maria,*” responded the clear boyish voices on the other side. Thus each versicle is chanted to the end :

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

“Intercede pro nobis ad Dominum Jesum Christum.”

The next morning, which was Sunday, I arose at a very early hour. As I crossed the courtyard of the monastery on my way to the church, the paving-stones were still wet with the dew of night. I heard Mass amongst a crowd of peasants, whose countenances were like rough sketches, carved in wood, of the Fathers and novices, before the master-hand had begun to finish his work, to idealize and refine the features and expression.

At half-past nine, after standing for some time on the balcony before my room, gazing on the lovely view, I took my departure from Fonte Colombo. On the greensward outside the church and monastery, groups of peasants, who had come up for a later Mass,

PILGRIM WALKS

were sitting or standing about and chatting. The Father Guardian accompanied me a little way beyond the gate, and pointed out the distant goals of my next pilgrimages on the other side of the valley—there the Convent of La Foresta; and yonder, high up in the mountains, the lonely hermitage of Poggio Buscone.

Then I bade him farewell, and went on my way down the steep, stony paths into the valley, and up again on the opposite side. All round me the grey mountains rose; in the foreground was the glittering crest of Monte Terminillo, almost the highest in Italy. At a turn in the road, I looked back and cast a last glance at Fonte Colombo, with its monastery, which I had just left, perched on the highest peak of the thickly wooded mountain. The little bell turret stood out sharply

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

against the sky. In the glen, the river flowed at the foot of the wood which surrounds the sanctuary, Il Bosco Sacro—"The Holy Wood," as the people call it. The atmosphere was warm and soft. I was once more down in the valley, amongst the habitations of men.

The next goal of my pilgrimage was La Foresta, which is about five miles from Rieti, and situated in the midst of a beautiful, extensive forest of oaks and chestnuts. This hallowed spot was the scene of the famous miracle of the multiplication of the grapes. Thither I now directed my steps.

It was noontide; the sun was scorching; a hot haze rested on the mountains. I left the highroad and took a side-path, following the course of a mountain stream which had hollowed out a bed for itself deep

PILGRIM WALKS

down between high earth-banks. Then I went through a valley exposed to the full blaze of the noonday sun; in it were leafless oaks, and great masses of bluish rock projecting out of the red earth and green grass; the path was a continual ascent. Thinking I must have nearly reached my destination, I inquired of some labourers, and heard that it was still distant. The road winds round a mountain, affording extensive views over the plain. At last I met a kindly peasant who undertook to act as my guide.

The way now led through a forest of oak trees by the side of a sheltered, grass-grown slope. At a turn in the road my companion pointed out Poggio Buscone, a dark spot among the distant mountains. Presently the path grew less steep, and before long we came in sight of a low, much-dilapi-

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

dated wall, behind which was the monastery of La Foresta.

Under the monastery porch I took leave of my guide, and soon the door was opened to me. While the porter took in my letter of introduction, I stood awaiting his return out in the courtyard. It consisted of four covered corridors surrounding a yard flagged with stone, on a somewhat higher level, having a well in the centre. Stretching upward above the corridors were four long, high roofs, their red tiles almost bleached by the hot sun, while over them was the deep-blue, cloudless vault of heaven.

Whilst I waited there—whether it was owing to the fatigue of my long uphill walk, or the effect of the burning midday-sun, I know not—a miserable feeling of depression took possession of me. Doubt and despon-

PILGRIM WALKS

dency filled my mind ; all my life, past and present, seemed a hopeless failure, the pursuit of a phantom—an *ignis fatuus*. And yet how great a responsibility rested on me ! All grew dark before my eyes ; I no longer saw the sunshine that flooded the courtyard of La Foresta. Some one touched me on the shoulder. I started. An old friar was standing beside me. Although the silvery hue of his thick hair and full beard bespoke old age, his strongly-marked, weather-beaten features were lighted up by large, singularly youthful eyes. Those clear brown eyes rested on my countenance with an expression of truly paternal kindness, and a pleasant smile played about his lips. He raised his skullcap. "Father Angelo, at your service," he said. I grasped the hand he held out to me—a strong, kind, fatherly

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

hand—as a shipwrecked mariner might grasp the hand stretched out to him over the edge of the boat that had come to rescue him.

Father Angelo inspired me at once with the greatest confidence; and when, a little later, I was sitting alone with him, I felt no hesitation in pouring out my heart to him, certain that I should find in him a friend, a father who would listen to my woes and direct me aright. Nor was I mistaken. When I had finished my confession, and listened to his kindly, wise exhortation, peace, confidence and courage had returned to my soul. Doubt and difficulty were banished; and when we stepped out again into the courtyard, the sun shone brightly, and above the roofs the sky was blue.

We passed into the garden, Father Angelo and I, and stood looking out

PILGRIM WALKS

over the valley. The monastery garden is laid out in terraces on the mountain-side—wide, grass-grown terraces, in which red roses and purple rosemary bloom, and where olives, pines, and cypresses raise their crests to the sky. Involuntarily I lingered in the garden, enjoying the pure air and fresh breeze; but Father Angelo insisted on taking me into the vineyard to show me the old, half-dead vine which is said to date from the time that St Francis was there. This year it had sent out three small, tender shoots.

From the garden we proceeded to the church, where beneath the altar was the vessel, *la vasca*—the press in which the miraculous grapes were pressed. “The priest could hardly have made his wine in the church,” the old Franciscan said smilingly. “We must suppose that the presbytery stood here

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

originally, and later on it formed part of the church. The legend asserts," he added, "that Pope Gregory IX. himself came from Rieti to witness the miracle."

We then went out into the sunshine again. The old friar escorted me through the garden, down one terrace after the other. I plucked a few wild flowers which were growing in the grass; and when he saw this, he gathered a bunch of roses and rosemary for me. At the lowest garden gate he bade me farewell, and I went on alone down the stony path. When I had gone a little distance, I turned and looked up: he was standing at the gate looking after me. I took off my hat and waved a greeting; then I saw him returning slowly to the monastery. On getting quite up to the door, he turned once more; I sent him a last salutation, which he returned; then he went into

PILGRIM WALKS

the house. Farewell, good Father Angelo! — my kind, fatherly friend, farewell!

As I pursued my solitary way down the mountain, I soon lost sight of La Foresta, and found myself in a wild ravine, between massive rocks. A new and curious scene presented itself. Before me lay a small village in festive garb; I saw a gay crowd, and heard the hum of voices. I made my way to the square before the church, where I was surrounded by the white headgear, trimmed with lace, and the many-coloured kerchiefs and dresses of the peasant women and girls. I had come in for a Sabine popular festival.

I naturally attracted some attention, with my black hat, my eyeglasses, and my travelling-bag. But there was no vulgar, open-mouthed staring; the good people certainly looked at the stranger,

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

exchanged a remark with a neighbour, laughed a little, and then turned their faces again in the direction of the church, whence they evidently expected something to issue. And, in fact, I soon heard the voice of singing, and out of the semi-darkness of the sacred edifice a banner of Our Lady emerged into the sunlight. It was borne aloft by a stalwart priest, and followed by a troop of young girls dressed in white, and then by a crowd of women in the costume of the countryside, looking like a bed of tulips. The men—some tall and slim, others short and thickset—who had been standing somewhat apart, now fell into the ranks, and a procession was formed.

I was just hesitating whether I should join them when the crowd fell back to make way for a sturdy, rosy-faced young man, wearing spectacles

PILGRIM WALKS

and town habiliments. He came up to me, and, raising his hat, inquired courteously, with a glance at my bag, whether I was perhaps wishing to take some photographs. I answered in the negative. "Ah, then," he said, a gleam of intelligence lighting up his features, "you have come for the sake of St Francis!" I assented, and a conversation ensued. He introduced himself to me as the son of the syndic, or mayor of Poggio Buscone.

"Poggio Buscone is the very place to which I am going!" I exclaimed.

"In that case, I advise you to join the procession here. These people come from Poggio Buscone; they have made a pilgrimage here, and now are returning home. Thus you shall have travelling companions, and will be sure not to lose your way. If you will allow me,

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

I shall see that your bag is carried for you."

He took the bag out of my hand and disappeared. In a moment he returned, but now mounted on a magnificent horse, with my bag strapped across his shoulders. The Mayor's son was, himself, actually going to take charge of the strange gentleman's property! He gave me a patronizing nod; then, with a wave of the hand made the signal to start, and the procession moved on. It was then past three o'clock.

We now proceeded by a narrow, stony path alongside the mountain. I wondered how it was possible to ride on such a road; but the large, well-groomed horse stepped cautiously and surely over the loose stones and masses of rock.

The banner of the Madonna led the

PILGRIM WALKS

way, followed by the girls in white; then came a crucifix, after which the men walked; next a brass band composed of twelve musicians, and finally a long retinue of both sexes. When the music stopped, the girls sang a monotonous, unvarying strain, in which the same refrain came over and over again:

Evivva Maria e chi la creò!

Evivva Maria e chi la creò!

All the forenoon they had sung in this same fashion on the way thither, and they would continue to do so until we reached Poggio Buscone at a late hour in the evening. The distance was thirteen kilometres* there, and as many back.

When we had covered a good part of the way, the mayor's son brought

* About eight miles.

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

his horse to my side. "Every year," he told me, "when the young girls of the parish make their First Communion, the inhabitants of Poggio Buscone perform this pilgrimage to San Felice. It is not so much a religious festival as a popular festivity, and the municipal authorities provide the music. Consequently not the clergy but the municipality is represented in it. It is a festival to which the people look forward all the year; and to-day it has been especially joyous, for it may be that St Felix has wrought a miracle for us." Thus the young man concluded, and then rode forward to give orders to the musicians.

The rough path led us over hill and vale, between the gnarled stems of silver-grey olives, beneath the oak forest which clothes the slope: across big, barren, stony fields; then suddenly

PILGRIM WALKS

through fertile valleys where the apple trees were in blossom. As the road sank, the procession displayed itself before me in all its many-coloured splendour.

Gradually I made acquaintance with a few of the pilgrims. Now and again one came up to me and began to talk, as we walked along the mountain-side. Far down at our feet lay the vale of Rieti half shrouded in blue haze. Some lakes could be seen glittering in the sunlight through the mist; I was told the names of them, but I have forgotten all except one—the Lake of Piediluco.

Soon we came in sight of a town that was built on successive stages of the mountain-side. The church steeples rose up above the grey roofs of the houses. I asked one of my new friends what was the name of the town. He

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

answered: "Cantalice!"—"Not Poggio Buscone, then?"—"It is a long way still to Poggio Buscone," he said, with a smile. "One can not even see it yet." Then he began to tell me about Cantalice.

"It is a very ancient town, built on the declivity of the mountain. From one row of houses you can step on to the roof of another. That old massive tower on the height is the fortress in which the inhabitants used to take refuge in former times on the approach of an enemy. Over the gateway is this inscription, *Fides Cantalica me construxit*. ('Cantalice's fidelity built me.') All the inhabitants joined in the work of building. And the big church on the top of the mountain, with the square before it, is San Felice, where St Felix of Cantalice is interred."

I remembered having seen a picture

PILGRIM WALKS

of that Saint—an old man with a white beard, carrying on his back a mendicant's wallet. On the wallet were the words, *Deo gratias*, which were frequently on his lips. And now I had come quite unexpectedly to the birthplace of that remarkable man—to Cantalice. We were soon in its streets, and, traversing the square, entered the church, where I witnessed a scene that I shall never forget.

The mayor's son had hinted, while talking on the way, at a miracle which it was thought San Felice might perform that day. The case was that of a young woman in poor circumstances, who had been lame for several years, and whom her father and her husband had taken with them on the pilgrimage, in the hope that she might obtain a cure. While on the spot where I first came upon the procession, she imagined that

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

she felt better, and now she was being carried to the Saint's burial place, in order to complete the cure that appeared to have begun.

In a niche behind the altar, over St Felix's grave, is a gigantic statue of the Saint, hung all over with glittering votive hearts. Between the statue and the wall of the choir there is a space about seven feet wide by five feet long. Thither the sick woman had been brought; and a dense crowd of people had flocked in after her, so that the building was literally packed. Two wax tapers had been lighted before the image—that of an old white-bearded man, with a kindly smile, tenderly holding in his arms the infant Jesus. Before the statue the invalid was half-sitting, half-kneeling, supported by her grey-haired father and black-haired husband, all three having their eyes

PILGRIM WALKS

fixed entreatingly on the Saint. Their prayers were audible, and found an echo and response in the multitude.

At first I did not quite understand it all. I thought that something wonderful had already happened; for just as I came up, I heard the people cry aloud: *Grazie, San Felice!* ("Thanks, St Felix!") This expression of thanks was repeated again and again, interrupted by long prayers which the sick woman's old father recited, and which all ended with a fervent, heartfelt *Grazie, grazie, San Felice!*

After I had been standing there a little while, I began to have a clearer notion of what was going on. They were not thanking the Saint for what he had already done, but for that which they hoped and expected him to do. A moral compulsion, so to speak, was being laid on him, by giving thanks to

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

him beforehand. He could not well do otherwise than grant their petition.

I pushed my way as far forward as I could—far enough, at any rate, to see the patient. Her eyes had a feverish look; there was a hectic flush on her cheeks; ever and anon she bent forward and pressed her burning lips to the feet of the Saint; the kiss being followed by the supplicating, sorrowful cry: “*O San Felice mio!*” At last the bystanders began to shake their heads. It was evident that San Felice was not to be persuaded. There was nothing more to be done; he was inexorable. So the vast crowd gradually dispersed; almost all went to join the procession, which was being formed again to proceed on its way.

But the patient, her father and her husband, did not give up all hope. They left the statue and knelt on the

PILGRIM WALKS

steps of the altar, the old peasant reciting with a trembling voice the *Salve Regina*—"Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy!" After this he said the Litany of Loreto, then a litany to all the saints whose names he knew; and, when he had exhausted his repertoire, winding up with one last, bitter cry, in which the flame of hope seemed once more to flare up as he called upon San Felice.

At length we left Cantalice, after having passed through it from top to bottom; it then rose above and behind us like a pile of architecture. Just outside the town we halted again. On a bridge over a river, whose bed was at that time dry, refreshment was offered us in the shape of cool, rather acid red wine, which was served out as we sat on the stone balustrade of the bridge.

While the pilgrims were resting, I

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

was introduced to the chief personages in Cantalice—the mayor, who gave an audience seated in a kind of gig, in which he had driven out to see the procession; and also to the two parish priests of the place, one of whom proved to be well read in Franciscan literature. Later on I made the acquaintance of the leader of the procession—the stalwart priest whom I saw in San Felice carrying the banner of the Madonna; he was Don Severino, the archpriest of Poggio Buscone. Finally up came a broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced countryman, who bowed, and introduced himself to me as Nazareno Matteucci. “You must let me put you up for the night,” he said; “for I can tell you there is not a single hotel in Poggio Buscone, and the convent is closed; so I always entertain the Brothers when they come over to us, from La Foresta, for instance, as well

PILGRIM WALKS

as any strangers who chance to pass this way.”

I thanked him for his kind offer, but took occasion to ask the son of the mayor who my new friend was. He gave him an excellent character. “Nazareno is one of the most prominent peasant proprietors in Poggio Buscone, a respectable and God-fearing man. Two of his sons are Franciscans, one a Capuchin; a fourth, who is still quite young, is in the seminary. He has two daughters who are Poor Clares, and one other son who is married and lives with his parents.”

The road now began to ascend up a steep and rugged mountain. Again and again I turned to look back at Cantalice, whose grey houses had assumed a roseate hue in the evening light, while the windows began to glow brightly in the rays of the setting sun. The girls were

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

singing the same strain with renewed energy :

Evviva Maria e chi la creò !

Nazareno Matteucci again came up to me and gave me an account of his household ; remarking that I should not feel the want of refined society there, as he had a brother, Benedetto by name, who had formerly studied for the priesthood—"he knows how to talk to a gentleman like you."

The sun had set when we left San Liberato, and in the plain the mist was rising. In the growing darkness we pursued our weary way between stone ramparts, through olive groves, past houses whose inmates came out to look at us ; and at last, after five hours, the girls in the van of the procession ceased their monotonous song, and we came out on a wide road bordered by houses.

PILGRIM WALKS

This was Borgo San Pietro, a suburb of Poggio Buscone.

Before long we were sitting at supper in Nazareno's house. Beside me sat my host, in his shirt sleeves, with his little granddaughter on his knee. Opposite me was his brother Benedetto, a tall, thin man with a white beard; last of all, the married son, a man of about twenty, with small, well-cut features. There were no women at table with us. The mistress of the house, Pasqua, waited on us herself. A big, stout woman, she went to and fro, heavy gold earrings dangling from her ears, her brown wrinkled neck half hidden by the ample collar of her white bodice.

Pasqua was angry because Nazareno had brought home a guest without letting her know beforehand. He might have sent someone on ahead—*somares-cando*, riding on a donkey. Now she

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

had nothing to set before the strange gentleman! What would he think of her? And Pasqua threw the horn-handled knives down on the tablecloth with such force that they literally danced. Neither of the men, however, seemed to take the least notice of her wrath. Pasqua Matteucci was a good woman, an excellent housewife, a kind mother and grandmother toward her numerous progeny. What matter it if she did bluster a bit? In the meantime we sat quietly drinking some good wine with our bread.

Benedetto was the chief talker. He took possession of me immediately, and monopolised my attention during the whole evening. His nephew was not allowed to interpose a word. All at once Benedetto stopped speaking and pointed to his brother. The worthy man, overcome by fatigue, and

PILGRIM WALKS

the unusual amount of wine he had drunk on the way, was fast asleep, his ruddy face bent on his chest. His little granddaughter had slipped off his knee long ago, and run to her grandmother in the kitchen. Benedetto shrugged his shoulders. "That is always the way with Nazareno!" he said. "As soon as one begins to talk about sensible subjects, he drops off to sleep. May blessed Mary—her name be praised for ever—protect the man!"

While we were talking, we did ample justice to the good fare Pasqua had set before us; and now I, regardless of the scorn Benedetto expressed for sleepy people, expressed a wish to go to bed. Accordingly I was conducted into the guest chamber, which opened out of the room in which we had been sitting. It was a spacious apartment,

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

with two very high beds, chests of drawers with crochet-work covers, a three-legged washstand, a stand with pegs for coats, and scraps of carpet scattered about the stone floor. The windows were fastened inside with a wooden bar; and young Matteucci, who accompanied me, carrying a candle, directed my attention to a gun standing by the bedside. "It *is* loaded," he said, laying an emphasis on the "is."—"Is there any need for that?" I asked. He smiled, said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders, as if to say it was well to be prepared for any emergency.

I arose the next morning at seven. On entering the dining-room, I found Benedetto breakfasting on bread and a glass of wine. Some hot milk was served for me; coffee is not to be had here among the peasants. Benedetto

PILGRIM WALKS

and I soon set off on the field path, between green hedges, each of us carrying a stick. We walked at a good pace, glad to be out in the fresh morning air, under the cloudless sky. "An itinerant life," my companion said, "is the best manner of life. It is the Franciscan life, the Apostolic life."

We crossed the dry bed of a river, in the midst of which a slender rivulet ran rippling between the big boulders; and soon reached the archpriest's house in the main street of the Borgo. We found Don Severino somewhat indisposed in consequence of the long march of the previous day; but he soon made ready to come with us. Outside in the street, the mayor's son joined us; he was then in his everyday clothes, but in all other respects the same as when we saw him last. His blue eyes smiled pleasantly behind his gold-rimmed

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

glasses. He, too, was going with us to Poggio Buscone.

It was still a long way to the goal of my journey. Unaccustomed as I was to mountaineering, I had imagined that I could visit La Foresta and Poggio Buscone in one day. But climbing mountains is slow work. The town, of which Borgo San Pietro is only a suburb, was five hundred metres above us; and then one has to cover an equal distance before reaching L'Eremo, St Francis' Hermitage. It is a very long walk, and all the way uphill.

We began to ascend slowly. If one has to climb a mountain, one must not attempt to go quickly; that is one of the first rules for mountaineering. After we had been walking for some time, we entered one of the first stairway-like streets of Poggio Buscone,

PILGRIM WALKS

where children were basking in the warm sunshine. Presently we got into a maze of small, steep alleys, all ascending more or less sharply. All was of stone—houses, steps, streets. Sometimes we walked over huge, rough slabs of stone—that was the rock jutting out into the street. It would almost seem as if the whole town had been hewn out of the rock, carved in the rock—a mountain peak transformed into human habitations.

Passing under a massive arch, we came out onto the market square. There we paused to rest awhile, and gaze on the splendid view. Going on, we descended through fresh labyrinths of stone, sunless and chilly. On the steps of the houses, women were sitting at needlework; they looked up and greeted the archpriest as he passed. Then we came to the church—the

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

cathedral of the place; it was being restored. There was nothing of interest about it. While we were inside, the parish priest—a young, good-looking man—came forward, with his Breviary in his hand, wearing a thoroughly worn-out cassock. We stood talking with him for a little while on the steps of the church.

What a strange life it must be for this young priest! Think of living year after year, and all the year long, in that poor little place perched up on the height, intellectually alone, with no other society than his Breviary, no other solace than the church, no other occupation than baptizing and burying, visiting the sick and hearing confessions, catechizing and preaching! Never so much as a newspaper, and seldom a new book; for the salary is too slender to admit of that. All the

PILGRIM WALKS

long winter through—and the winter is very rigorous in those elevated regions—no other fire than a brasier to warm his benumbed fingers before saying Mass; an utter absence of all comforts, not to speak of luxuries; scarcely a sufficiency of daily bread, and a glass of thin wine—such is life in a presbytery among the Sabine hills.

To-day is a gala day for the young priest, since it brings visitors from the lowlands. When we had been standing and talking awhile, Don Severino beckoned to one of the boys who stood near, and sent him on an errand. The lad soon returned with a bottle of absinthe and some glasses; the liquor was poured out and the small glasses emptied.

Bidding farewell to the priest, we resumed our toilsome ascent, upward and onward, and soon the town lay far

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

below us. The landscape was spread out at our feet like a map, on which the blue lakes, green fields, and white roads were plainly marked. All around was silence and absence of life. Now and again we saw a green lizard glide over the sun-warmed rock, and once we stopped to drink from a clear, cool brook flowing past in its stony channel.

We went on climbing higher and higher. The path had turned, and led over a barren mountain ridge, beneath which the hermitage was built. It was now a perpetual zigzag of flights of irregular steps. A succession of little chapels stood by the roadside; in one is to be seen a piece of rock bearing the footprint of St Francis; in another, the impress of his hand; in a third, the depression made by his elbow when he leaned on the rock. Benedetto eagerly pointed out to me these remarkable

PILGRIM WALKS

relics. "The impression left by his elbow," he explained, "was made when the Saint was on his way to Poggio Buscone, and rested his head on his hand while looking at the town. He arrived there at three o'clock in the morning; that is why the bells of the town are still rung at that hour on October 4, St Francis' Day."

At last the path ceased to ascend. We went on alongside the great, bluish-grey wall of rock on the summit of the mountain, whose highest peak was still many hundred yards above us. All at once, at a turn in the path, we came in sight of the sanctuary toward which we had so long been toiling. At the extreme end of the path was a very small chapel—*Il Santuario*—with a lean-to roof that slopes down from the wall of rock, and supports on its extreme edge a modest little turret, in

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

which a bell is suspended. A few irregular steps, six or seven in number, lead up to the door of the chapel. The chapel itself is divided into two sections—a lower and an upper one. The lower is only a sort of porch, from which a staircase ascends, beneath the huge, projecting rock, to the actual grotto, the Hermitage of St Francis. Over the stairs are the words: *Hic remissa tibi sunt peccata tua sicut postulasti*—“Here thy sins [O Francis] were forgiven thee according as thou didst pray.”

We mounted the narrow stairs, taking care to stoop our heads in order not to strike them against the hard rock. A small altar is set up in the grotto; it is in a kind of alcove. The altarpiece represents St Francis at prayer, and Brother Giles asleep. The ground of the chapel is the rock, but

PILGRIM WALKS

the altar is raised on a low wooden platform, on which the priest can stand when Mass is said there.

We lingered a few moments in devout silence. Then the mayor's son got up, put his walking-stick in a loophole in the wall, and rang out a succession of strokes on the bell hanging in the tiny turret. It was exactly noon; he rang the Angelus; the notes sounded far and wide over the valley.

Before leaving, I looked closely at the chapel, the goal of so long a journey. It actually consists of only a roof and a wall, in which are three small windows—three little loopholes—and a cross formed of two round bits of untrimmed branches. Poverty-stricken as the chapel is now, it was yet more so when St Francis knelt there in prayer; for then the hermitage

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

was nothing but a natural grotto in the mountain, with no roof but the overhanging rock, in the clefts of which a few shrubs grow. In that desolate solitude the Saint received the blissful assurance that his sins were forgiven him.

It had taken us three hours to come up from Borgo San Pietro. The return journey was accomplished far more speedily. It was my intention, that afternoon, to cross the vale of Rieti to Greccio and go thence by train to Terni.

On reaching Nazareno's house, Benedetto and I dined together. One of the dishes was part of a young lamb, cut up into very small pieces, mere mouthfuls; bones, cartilage, meat, and all boiled together and served with a piquant sauce. "There is very little nourishment in it; one eats it because

PILGRIM WALKS

it is toothsome," said Benedetto, with the air of an epicure.

While I was putting my things into my bag, Pasqua came in and looked on. "I am sorry that thou art going away so soon, my son," she said to me. "The socks thou didst take off this morning want mending; I was going to mend them this afternoon." She went with me to the outside flight of steps; we were speaking of the excursion to the chapel that morning. "Yes," she said, "that is a place of which the very atmosphere is holy—*che spira santità.*"

I then expressed my thanks for her hospitality and took leave of her, begging her to bid farewell for me to Nazareno, who was out on the land. Benedetto accompanied me part of the way, to put me into the right road. At a short distance from the town we

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

bade each other good-bye; but long after his tall form had disappeared behind the acacia hedge of a field path, his hearty "*Addio, Sor Giovanni mio!*" rang in my ears.

The road speedily took me down into the low-lying land. The apple trees were in full bloom, the birds were singing, children were playing before the houses. The bean fields were in flower, and the air was full of their fragrance. Again and again I turned and looked back. I could not discern Nazareno Matteucci's house amid the many other farmhouses at the foot of the olive-grown hill. The old grey town stood out prominently, however, on the height above; and over that rose the bare, uncultivated mountain, with patches of purple forest, and traversed by paths of a reddish hue. The hermitage was not to be seen from

PILGRIM WALKS

where I stood ; it lay in a recess of the mountain ; only a corner of the wood above it was visible.

I walked on and on, farther and farther out into the wide, open country. Before me the town of Greccio was in full view ; in fact, for some time the road led directly towards it. Presently it turned in the direction of Rieti. I had to ask my way. In the company of three or four workmen, I took a short cut along a narrow path leading to a river, over which we were ferried by a sturdy young woman. One of the men helped her to manage the sail, and, when we reached the other side, paid her for his passage with a kiss. My companions and I went for a drink to a tavern near the station at Greccio. It happened to be just after the time of leaving work ; the tavern was full of workmen and other nondescript indi-

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

viduals. All were, however, well behaved and even polite. When I had paid for one bottle of red wine, my companions insisted on providing a second, but they would not accept my offer of a third. Then we parted company. I repaired to the station, and paced up and down the platform, looking up to the dark mountains, where a few lights were visible, and where I knew that my friends in the monastery were assembled for night prayers. Suddenly the curfew bell rang from the height. I felt almost as if my home were there.

It was midnight when I reached Foligno. I got some one to show me the way to my hotel; it was but a few steps through a broad avenue lighted with electric light. Before long I was in a comfortable bed, and forgot all my weariness in sound slumber.

IV

ASSISI

THE next morning I visited the tomb of Blessed Angela of Foligno, in the Franciscan church of that town. Her remains are enclosed in a magnificent sarcophagus, the sides of which are plated with gold. Afterward I betook myself to the residence of the cathedral canons, and made acquaintance with Mgr. Faloci, of literary renown—a slim little priest, whose smooth face and regular features are essentially Italian. I presented him with a copy of my Danish translation of the *Fioretti*, and he in return gave me his *Life*

PILGRIM WALKS

of St Clare of Montefalco, the best biography of her as yet published.

In the afternoon I resumed my pilgrimage. By the time the train reached Spello, where it stopped a while, the sky had become overcast and the mountains were shrouded in grey mist. I sat at the window, looking out. Before long I caught sight of an outline in the distance, strongly marked against the grey sky—the familiar outline of the mountain above Assisi, on the summit of which stands St Clare's castle. In another minute the whole town came into view, a clearly defined line of buildings at the foot of Mount Subasio. As we proceeded I saw the fissure at Carceri, and in the midst of the green vineyards the pointed gable and the spire of the little church of Rivo Torto. And then, quite in the foreground, I beheld the

PILGRIM WALKS

church wherein St Francis is interred, and the big monastery beside it. I recognised the towers of Assisi one after the other; the tower and dome of the cathedral up above, the tower on the Piazza lower down, with the spires and towers of Santa Maria del Vescovado, the Chiesa Nuova, and others.

On leaving the station, I set off immediately toward the ivory-like buildings of the Franciscan monastery which gleamed in the evening light; a strong, sweet smell was wafted to me from the flowery meadows as I passed; in the distance were the towers and mountains of Perugia. I remembered it all so well from a former visit some ten years ago.

On I went, past Casa Gualdi, the place where St Francis, when dying, gave his last blessing to Assisi; past

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

the little Gothic chapel to the right of the road, where a lamp burns before an image of the Madonna ; up the small, steep flight of steps leading to the city gate, where, leaning on the parapet, I gazed out over the landscape, the vast plain shut in by violet-hued mountains bathed in the golden radiance of the setting sun. Passing on, I soon found myself before the church and monastery of San Francesco.

When I entered the church, it was almost dark within the broad, low nave ; the windows, with their saints in bright and varied colours, looked as if set with jewels. I went up to and past the high altar, where some lay-brothers were cleaning and arranging the furniture ; and turned into the south transept, to look again at the well-remembered frescoes. Then I

PILGRIM WALKS

peeped into the sacristy and saw the dark, carved oak chests and presses, all exactly the same as I saw them ten years before. I felt as if I were in a dream—a delightful dream, from which I dreaded to awake.

Before leaving the church I went down into the crypt, feeling my way in the darkness with hand and foot, until I stood before the railing that surrounds the tomb of the Saint, where flickered a number of little lamps. In the profound tranquillity of that hallowed spot I realised that I was really again in Assisi, with which so many happy memories and holy aspirations were associated.

Passing later by St Clare's Church, built of red and white stone, I went down the road bordered by olive trees to San Damiano. The church was

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

quite dark, for it was now eventide; yet there was light enough for one to see Tiberio of Assisi's fresco in the little chapel in the courtyard—a charming harmony of pale, subdued tints. I sat down to rest for a few minutes on the bench outside the convent gate. The sunset sky showed golden between the delicate grey leaves of the olive trees. Two aged friars came slowly down the road; they knocked at the gate and were admitted.

I wandered about the town for some time longer, sauntering through the long, lonely avenues, where only here and there a solitary lamp shed a feeble light, and climbing the narrow, steep streets before betaking myself to my night quarters. The streets were quiet and almost deserted. All seemed unchanged.

PILGRIM WALKS

Early the next morning I was awake. The chime of bells came in on the cool morning air. Looking from my window, I saw below the grey, moss-covered roofs of the town, still wet with dew, and the church of San Pietro. Somewhat later I took the same way that I had followed on the day before—the road leading to San Damiano. There was something exhilarating about the early hours of that sunny May morn. Between the olive trees the corn stood already half high, a bright, rich green; and the olive leaves were of a fresher, less dull grey than in summer. All looked so fresh, so full of life, in the bright scene before me, that, on arriving at San Damiano, I could not resolve to go into the church at once to look at antiquities and relics: I thought I would walk along the field paths for

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

a little while, under the olives on the hillside.

As I went I met an old Franciscan pacing up and down in the sunshine, his Breviary in his hand, keeping the place with his thumb, while his admiring gaze was fixed on the clear blue heavens. Our eyes met, and the old Father smiled in his long, grey beard, a smile that beamed with good-nature, and without preamble he exclaimed: "*Che bello cielo!*" (What a lovely sky!) I stopped, and we entered into conversation. With the garrulity of old age, he discoursed long on the beauty of nature, declaring it to be the best of temples wherein to worship, laud, and magnify the God of creation. Then he bade me a courteous farewell, and passed on his way; while I entered the cool, shady little church, resolved to see everything there which

PILGRIM WALKS

recalls St Francis and St Clare, those two Saints who were one in spirit, and whose life was one of prayer, of poverty, and of praise.

The Daughters of St Clare no longer dwell in the poor convent at San Damiano (that is now inhabited by the Brothers), but higher up, close to the Porta Nuova, where is the large church erected by Philip da Spoleto in the middle of the thirteenth century, not long after the basilica over the grave of St Francis was completed. It was there accordingly that I sought for further memorials of San Damiano. I saw the Byzantine crucifix whose mute eloquence appealed so forcibly to Francis' youthful heart, and was so decisive for his whole life, that from that time forward it was said of him that he bore the wounds of the Lord Jesus in his heart.

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

I also saw a notable relic and precious heirloom of St Francis—the Breviary that Brother Leo wrote for him, and, as an inscription in the book informs one, out of which, “as long as his health permitted, he used to recite the Office in accordance with the regulations of the Rule; and when he was no longer well enough to recite it himself, he desired to have it read in his presence, and this was done as long as he lived. Whereupon Brother Angelo and Brother Leo earnestly entreated the Lady Benedicta, abbess of this convent of St Clare, and all who should succeed her, to keep and preserve always with the utmost care this book whereof our Father so often made use, in pious remembrance of our holy Father.” This request has been fulfilled: the Breviary, executed on beautiful parchment in Brother Leo’s

PILGRIM WALKS

elegant penmanship, is preserved to our day under lock and key in a doubly secure reliquary.

From St Clare's Church I went down into the crypt below; for here, as in San Francesco, it is a place of interment. Ever since 1850, when the spot where she was buried was discovered, and the crypt built, the body of St Clare, undecomposed by the lapse of centuries, may be seen by every visitor. A curtain is drawn aside, a wax taper is held by a Sister, and behind an iron railing, fronting a large square of glass, is seen the form of the Saint, beautiful in her last, long sleep. "*Clara nomine, vita clarior, clarissima moribus,*" says Thomas of Celano.

There was still much to be seen in and around Assisi. I spent one afternoon in taking a long walk over Mount

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

Subasio to Carceri, the secluded monastery situated in a laurel-clad cleft in the mountains, where Brother Rufino was sorely tempted by the devil in the form of the Crucified. On the following morning I visited Rivo Torto, down below on the plain; and Portiuncula, which lies close to the station.

Rivo Torto is the place where Francis dwelt with his earliest disciples, after his return from Rome, when Innocent III. had given his sanction to their manner of life. Their habitation was a mere shed, and so little space was there in it that there was hardly room for all to sit down. To prevent confusion, and that each might know his place, Francis wrote the names of the Brothers in chalk on the boards. Neither church nor chapel was there; the Brothers erected a large wooden cross before the shed,

PILGRIM WALKS

and round it they used to kneel in prayer. It is probably in remembrance of this that a large cross always stands before Franciscan houses.

They had no means of subsistence unless they could obtain employment by helping the peasants in field work, when provisions were given them in payment for their labour. Ofttimes these penitents of Assisi, as they styled themselves, returned empty-handed from their begging expeditions; and then they had to be satisfied with turnips instead of bread, water instead of wine. To us it seems a hazardous undertaking on Francis' part to embrace such rigorous poverty, and one often wonders how ten or twelve men could live thus, without bread to eat, a fire at which to warm themselves, or books to read. Yet the annals of the Order record only one desertion amongst

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

the first disciples : Brother John of the Hat, so called because he objected to wear the cowl which forms part of the habit of the Order.

Leaving Rivo Torto, I took the straight road to Portiuncula—or, as the place is now called, Santa Maria degli Angeli. There in the large, light church, and in the monastery adjoining it, are all the well-known relics and hallowed spots : the original chapel of the Portiuncula, that Francis built with his own hands ; the cell in which he expired, and wherein, over the altar, is now Luca della Robbia's statue of the Saint ; and, near the entrance, Pisano's painting on the lid of the Saint's coffin. Then there is the rose garden where the bushes are strangely flecked as if with spots of blood ; and the chapel erected over St Francis' cell, decorated with frescoes

PILGRIM WALKS

from the brush of Lo Spagna and Tiberio d'Assisi.

In the Sacristy the usual souvenirs of the place were offered to me for purchase; and while there I made the acquaintance of the young Padre Alberto, Nazareno Matteucci's son, from Poggio Buscone, to whom I had sent word that I was there. He advanced to meet me with a look of inquiry in his large brown eyes—a slight, strikingly handsome young man. I grasped his hand and said I was the bearer of all manner of kind greetings from his home—from Nazareno, Pasqua, Uncle Benedetto, Don Severino, and the mayor's son, Signor Provaroni. At each name I mentioned he opened his eyes wider. At last he burst out with the inquiry, "But who are you, then?" and at the same moment his eyes were suffused with tears. All

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

Poggio Buscone, all his home was suddenly brought before him.

Yet it ill beseems a Franciscan friar to stand crying like a child ; so, pulling himself together, Padre Alberto quickly took hold of my sleeve and drew me into the refectory. "Come!" he said. "Have you dined? Ah, that is a pity! But a glass of wine—you will have a glass of wine?" Whereupon he hastened to his place at table and took some of the wine which had been put there for him to drink at supper, depriving himself of it for me. Must he not offer some refreshment to the lips that had brought him such loving, welcome messages from home? His hand shook as he poured out a glass for me—for the stranger who had come to speak to him of all his loved ones—and the tears still stole down from his long, dark eyelashes. Ah,

PILGRIM WALKS

Poggio Buscone, the home of his boyhood! Ah, his dear old mother Pasqua, his father; the good old grey-haired Uncle Benedetto, who had held him on his knee and taught him his letters; the dilapidated little church, where as a boy he served Don Severino's Mass; the distant village of San Felice, whither he had gone on pilgrimage year after year! All that was so far away from him, and yet so near to his heart; and now came a stranger who had seen all and everyone, who was there only a few days ago, who had sat at table with his father and uncle, who had been waited on by his mother, and had talked to his brother, who seemed to bring with him the very atmosphere of home. What a strange thing life is, and how easily the heart is touched!

Presently I left the monastery and the church, and before long was seated

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

outside one of the little inns opposite to the large basilica, of the Renaissance period, which St Pius V. caused to be built over Brother Francis' simple little chapel. And while the day drew to a close and the sun shed its golden radiance over the scene, while the big fountain alongside the wall of the church splashed down from its many mouths, I sat down and pondered.

At half-past three the next morning I went with my worthy host of the hotel, Santa Maria degli Angeli, the short distance to the station. It was a dark, warm morning. My host carried a lighted candle in his hand: there was not a breath of wind to make it flicker. We soon reached the station. The train arrived almost immediately, and I got into a coach crowded with night travellers—a mixed company of not altogether desirable companions.

PILGRIM WALKS

As I sat by the window I watched Assisi disappear from sight, a dark silhouette with three solitary lights.

I had not slept much that night. In the evening, not long after the Angelus rang, just as I was thinking I should go to rest early, the bells of Assisi struck up, calling to me in their festive notes, jubilant and yet solemn. San Francesco's bells went on ringing and ringing. Up there on the hill stood San Francesco's convent, with all its windows lighted up; and almost before I knew what I was doing I was on my way to the convent, whose bells were ringing and whose lights were gleaming. I felt I must go up once more to Assisi; I must once more experience the singular, intoxicating charm of those streets, those steep alleys, those unpaved ways and open squares.

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

So on and on I went until I got up there, and could wander about everywhere unnoticed and unknown, visiting all the spots that were so dear to me: the square in front of Santa Chiara; the road with the wide vista of the open country beyond the Porta Nuova; the steep, narrow alley leading up to Sant' Andrea; all the localities rich in memories and associations—all of which I was to leave behind me on the morrow, and which I should perhaps never revisit. Once more I passed by the green gate of St Philomena's little convent, and lingered before the grating, thinking of the Brothers who were calmly reciting their Latin night prayers within, as they would do on the morrow when I should be no longer there, as they would be doing should I return thither some time or other after the lapse of years.

PILGRIM WALKS

At length I tore myself away. At the corner where the highroad to Assisi turns off to the church and monastery, I sent back a last, lingering look. High up above, I saw under an arch in the wall the swinging lantern whose light had often shone upon me of an evening in days long past, when I sat at my window listening to the conflicting voices within me. Only one woman, dressed in black, came noiselessly down the narrow, deserted street, and I heard the purling of the brook. Farewell, Assisi—*Assisi mio*, farewell!

In a state of exaltation I walked all the long way from Assisi back to Portiuncula. The night air was perfumed with the scent of flowers; the sky was spangled with innumerable stars; the bells of Assisi were silent, but the light in the windows was still visible

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

behind me. Again and again I could not refrain from looking back; again and again I felt I must repeat my farewell. Even when I had regained my room at the hotel, I looked out for one last sight of the tremulous lights of Assisi. Farewell, hallowed city of a thousand memories, of my dreams, my longings, and my faith! Farewell Assisi—farewell, farewell!

And now behold me seated in the train speeding northward—speeding toward Terontola. We reached Perugia just at daybreak. Four working-men with big bundles got in; they seemed very jolly and merry. They talked and shouted noisily, threw their packages about, lighted cigars. “*Addio, Perugia!*” the oldest and most jovial of them all called out when the train began to move out of the station. The words had scarcely escaped his lips

PILGRIM WALKS

before he burst into tears, sobbing and crying convulsively with his head against the window frame. The others tried to comfort him. "Come, come, Francè!" they said soothingly, and endeavoured to stroke his hand. But he pushed them away and continued to cry. "He is going away from his children," his comrades said to us. They were emigrants going to Nice.

At Cortona I alighted. I wished to visit the town which St Margaret made famous; and I also wished to see the Franciscan monastery of Celle, near that same town.

V

CORTONA. ON THE WAY TO MOUNT ALVERNA

LOOKED at from below, Cortona presents a very pleasing aspect, with St Margaret's Church standing out conspicuously on the highest point. It is a modern structure, but built in an old style of architecture of black and white marble. The town is, however, unclean and full of beggars and idlers.

Soon after midday I set out for Celle. It is one of the very oldest settlements of the Franciscan Order. The day was warm ; a hot haze brooded over the wide valley of Chiesa, marked out as it

PILGRIM WALKS

was into vineyards, dotted about with cypresses, intersected by white roads. Blue mountains rose in the distance. I heard the cuckoo's cry, and gay butterflies flitted past me.

At present the monastery of Celle (the Cells) is inhabited by Capuchin friars, and popular parlance has given their name to the locality. One must not ask in Cortona the way to Celle : one must ask the way to *I Cappuccini*. It struck me as one of the most peculiar, fantastic spots I had ever visited.

At the bottom of a deep fissure in Monte Sant' Egidio rushes a turbulent river, spanned in several places by stone bridges with bold arches. The old convent, situated on both sides of the chasm, consists of a small number of scattered houses, rising one above another on different shelves of rock, having gardens in which the friars may

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

be seen walking about or working busily. Everywhere are steps, balustrades, terraces, gable-ends, bell-turrets, trees ; and on the eminence above rises a forest of ilexes and dark, pointed cypresses.

The zigzag path, roughly paved with large, uneven slabs of stone, leads down to the bottom of the chasm, where you cross one of the bridges beneath which the greenish waters of the rapid river rush noisily, to ascend again on the opposite side, till at last you come to an open greensward, the space before the monastery, where stands the traditional cross. The entrance to the church and to the house are under the projecting roof of a rather low lean-to, in one corner of which is a stone table surrounded by stone benches. I am told these are for the accommodation of the inhabitants of Cortona, who make excursions thither

PILGRIM WALKS

on Sundays, provided with luncheon baskets.

The most noteworthy thing about Celle is its peculiar situation ; for there are not many reminiscences of St Francis there. A black - bearded Capuchin wearing spectacles, with particularly regular, white teeth, showed me the little that there is to be seen—the cell where St Francis used to pray : a cold, damp, dismal room, with one loophole of a window looking out over the brawling river and the naked rock. One of the walls was decorated with a painting of the Madonna in Byzantine style.

Then I left Celle. It had begun to rain. A mechanic, with whom I entered into conversation by the way, took me by a short cut across the mountain to St Margaret's Church. We were wet through when we got there ; it was

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

already almost quite dark in the church. The kindly, brown-habited Franciscans were most cordial in their reception of us ; they did what they could for us, and showed us everything : here was the cell of St Margaret, which in her time stood on the bare, rocky hill above the town ; there hung the crucifix which spoke to her ; there again, on the back of her sarcophagus over the high altar, was her portrait, painted by Pietro da Cortona—a faithful representation of her body after death, exactly as it still remains uncorrupt unto this day. Could we see her remains ? No indeed ; no one is allowed to do that. The municipal authorities of Cortona have had a lock put on the shrine, and will not give up the key. Quite recently a visitor came with a letter of recommendation from Cardinal Ferrari ; but it availed him nothing : he had to go back

PILGRIM WALKS

as he came. It is, of course, naught else but officious meddling; the mayor is a Liberal, and cares not a jot for St Margaret; yet he likes to annoy us by keeping her under lock and key. So said my guide.

From the church the cheerful young Father—his name is Cherubino; he teaches philosophy to the young Franciscans who are pursuing their studies here—took us into the refectory, where quite a little crowd of Fathers and Brothers gathered around us. We chatted about all manner of things with them while partaking of some refreshment.

When we emerged on to the wind-swept greensward in front of the church, the rain had ceased; the air was cold, and wonderfully pure and invigorating. Darkness had closed in; the lamps were lighted in the town below. Father

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

Cherubino kindly accompanied us a short distance, but the way down was not difficult to find.

Presently we reached Cortona. Through steep, rain-washed streets we got into the centre of the town. On the market-place I took leave of my companion. "Good-bye, sir!" he said, adding: "*Ci vedremo in cielo!*" (May we meet again in heaven!)

Next morning I was up by five o'clock, and soon on my way to Mount Alverna, in the valley of Casentino, somewhat south of Florence. The train stopped at Arezzo, whence a side-line took me to Bibbiena. The distance from there to Mount Alverna is about eight miles—eight miles which must be covered either in a carriage, on horse-back, or on foot. I chose the latter way, to the evident astonishment of the Bibbiena cab-drivers, of whom there

PILGRIM WALKS

were a good number at the station. They could not believe that I was in earnest, the honest fellows. They followed me up the streets of the town; they reduced their fare more and more, thinking that my refusal of their offer was a stratagem to get the conveyance more cheaply. At last one after the other desisted from their pursuit of me, saying, with a shake of their heads: "This foreign gentleman is crazy; he means to *walk* to La Verna!" Yes, I intended to walk to La Verna, to climb the mountain—that "rugged rock between the Tiber and the Arno" of which Dante speaks; where Brother Francis received the seal of Christ, and bore it two years, until the day of his death.

I had scarcely gone any distance in the pelting rain when I saw a lofty range of mountains before me, and one

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

jagged ridge which rose high above the others. That was the goal of my pilgrimage — Mount Alverna. The weather was warm, in spite of the rain ; out over the green fields I heard the cuckoo's note, and now and again my ear caught the sound of bells, indistinct in the distance. The muddy road descended first, then ascended again ; presently I reached a place where it divided, and a plain grey stone bore these inscriptions on either side, "To the Romagna" ; and, "To La Verna." I chose the latter, a gravelled way leading upward to an eminence planted with young copper beeches, on the stiff young leaves of which the rain beat down, as it pattered monotonously on the umbrella which, fortunately, I had taken the precaution of purchasing in Arezzo. Between the young trees the bright golden gorse was in blossom, and

PILGRIM WALKS

I heard the tinkle of sheep bells in the meadows.

I trudged on for a long time over this range of hills. All around were mountain ridges of greater height, one behind the other, all half shrouded in grey mist. Bibbiena, now far below, looked like a white streak on the hill, surrounded by dark cypresses.

From the hilltop the road again led down into a valley. The weather began to clear; a passing break in the clouds lighted up a grey, foaming river, a tributary of the Arno, and a row of tall poplars just coming into leaf on its banks. As I crossed the bridge over this river I gave its swift-flowing waters a greeting to bear to fair Florence, where before long they would run rippling beneath the Goldsmith's Bridge.

The way was now a continual, but gentle ascent. A mountain brook

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

murmured down below; the song of a nightingale reached me from the warm, verdant valley. From a thick wood of oaks as yet leafless I came out upon cultivated fields and vineyards, interspersed with big boulders of rock. Presently cultivation ceased; I passed through untilled fields, where lambs were grazing among blocks of grey stone. Here and there a shepherd boy was sitting. All around were mountains and clouds. Bibbiena and Poppi, which had been hidden by the forest, now reappeared to sight, but much farther away and much lower down. I could no longer see the mountain range of La Verna in the foreground.

I walked on and on—sometimes standing still for a while, then on again quickly. On all sides I heard the murmuring, gurgling springs which trickle out between the stones. The cuckoo

PILGRIM WALKS

called in the wood below, and from out yonder a more prolonged song was sounding. Onward and upward.

Quite suddenly the clouds came down like a white fog, and I could see nothing beyond the brown hills in my immediate vicinity. A woman was standing by the wayside, feeding her sheep and spinning meanwhile. What with two coats and the weight of my bag, I got quite overheated. But still higher and higher I had to go. Now there were a few houses built of stone alongside the road; in one of them the traveller was informed that *Pane, vino e generi diversi* were to be had, the latter being probably salt and tobacco—the two articles on which duty was paid. I did not care about any of the “various sorts,” and went on past the houses.

In a field I saw three women standing with distaffs, spinning busily. Up-

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

right and immovable they stood, silhouetted dark against a foggy background. They resembled statues of the Fates. In the valleys on each side of the mountain which I was crossing I could descry nothing but volumes of white mist; and when these rolled away, blue vapour rising from the soil.

All of a sudden the clouds before me broke, disclosing La Verna again to my view. I had got much, very much, nearer to it. I could see that the lower section of the mountain is reddish-brown, from the forest trees; above, it is dark and jagged in outline, from the firs that clothe it.

I paused a while, and tried to make a sketch of La Verna. The sky had cleared to some extent; down in the valley I saw smoke rising, and I heard children's voices singing in their shrill soprano. I listened attentively and

PILGRIM WALKS

caught a few words—these lines which recurred over and over again as a refrain :

Stendi la mano, O Maria !

O Maria, nostra speranza—

“Hold out thy hand to us, O Mary !

O Mary, in whom is our hope !”

The *i* in Maria was every time so sharply accentuated that it rang like a cry—a cry for help.

For a long time the singing continued. I could not see the singers, but felt sure they must be boys. Presently from the other side of the mountain another voice struck in, one less powerful, sweeter—a woman’s voice, perhaps. They answered each other, the two songs ; and at last the voices met in chorus, finally dying away in one loud, animated, lingering strain :

Evviva, evviva Maria !

Maria, mamma mia !

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

I quickened my pace as I went on. An icy wind met me, and I had to button up my coat. Before I was aware of it, I found myself enveloped in a white mist much denser than the former one. It soon turned to rain, and the rain became a torrent. La Verna was no longer visible; no songs were now to be heard. I plodded on my lonely way over the sodden ground beside a grass-grown dike. I began to realise that I had been walking a long, long way; but I must push onward, onward!

Again a few houses were discernible through the mist—square, poor-looking houses built of stone. The road, too, was paved here. I was passing through a very small town. I even saw a post office. “R. Poste” was on a large official board beside a small, closed door.

PILGRIM WALKS

How it rained—rained as it does rain in Italy : not drops, but sheets of water, lashing one like a whip ! The street was paved unevenly ; I stepped into pools, and got splashed up to my waist. The rain dripped from my umbrella down my back ; I was already cold and wet up to my knees ; now the wet began to soak through my overcoat, so that I could no longer warm my hands by putting them into the pockets. I had left the town far behind me, and got to an interminable succession of zigzag stone steps up the mountain. I thought I must have nearly reached my destination ; for I felt that my strength would not hold out much longer. Clear water coursed down the steps like a river ; my boots were limp and soaked, and great, heavy drops dripped through my umbrella on to my unhappy shoulders ; there was scarcely a dry

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

thread on me. Nearly four hours had elapsed since I left Bibbiena. At every bend in the way a fresh set of steps appeared, but as yet no gate, no monastery. In fact, as I afterward learned, the monastery is nearly five hundred metres from the town where I saw the post office; La Beccia is its name.

All at once, at a fresh turn in this apparently endless ladder-like ascent, I saw a small building at a little distance. I hastened up to it; it was a votive chapel, a wayside shrine of the kind frequently seen in Italy. I stood for a minute looking at it, not quite knowing what to make of it, when an old inscription carved in marble caught my eye—an inscription from which I learned that this was the spot where the birds bade St Francis welcome to Mount Alverna.

PILGRIM WALKS

Then the monastery could not be far off. I pushed on with fresh courage, and almost before I was aware of it I saw a big, open archway of masonry in the wall of rock on the left-hand side of the road. Over it I read these impressive words: *Non est in toto orbe sanctior mons*—"In all the world there is no holier mountain than this."

Passing through the gateway, I entered a wide courtyard paved with flagstones, in which, a little way off, was a statue of St Francis. I had got into harbour at last! Some men were standing in a cloister out of the rain; I went up to them and asked them to show me the way to the monastery. Without saying a word, one of them went and rang at a door. It opened noiselessly, and on a high staircase I saw a Franciscan coming down to meet me. I shut my dripping umbrella, the

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

rain still pouring down me, and went a few steps up the stairs. "Father, you see before you a hapless pilgrim drenched to the skin." He took my hand and led me with him, not stopping until we found ourselves in a room where a huge fire was blazing. Then he took off my overcoat, poured me out a glass of wine, heaped more logs on the fire, and begged me to take off all my clothes and hang them before the fire to dry. Thereupon he disappeared, promising to come back after a while. At last I was on Alverna, the sacred mountain; and I was glad.

VI

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

THE Franciscan monastery on Mount Alverna is an extensive building, comprising several different structures, erected in the course of seven centuries. The stranger soon learns to distinguish these principal parts: La Chiesina, a church dating from the latter half of the thirteenth century, corresponding to the chapel constructed, by Count Orlando's orders, under the title of Santa Maria degli Angeli, for St Francis and his Brothers; Chiesa maggiore, the principal church, in the form of a cross, in the simple and noble style of the fourteenth century, enriched with as many as six of Della

PILGRIM WALKS

Robbia's best paintings ; the monastery, in front of which is a small space flagged with stone, whence a far-reaching view of the majestic mountain scenery may be obtained ; and finally the Chapel of the Stigmata, erected in 1263, on the spot where St Francis, on that fourteenth day of September 1224, received the marks of Christ's sacred wounds. This chapel is situated a considerable distance from the monastery and other buildings, with which it is connected by a covered way.

Twice in the twenty-four hours—in the afternoon after Vespers, and in the night after Matins—the friars wend their way to the Chapel of the Stigmata to commemorate the wondrous miracle. They do not keep silence as they go : the walls re-echo the voice of prayer and praise ; and when they reach the chapel they kneel down and recite the

PILGRIM WALKS

antiphon in honour of St Francis :
Signasti hic, Domine, servum tuum Franciscum signis redemptionis nostræ.
("Here, O Lord, Thou didst impress upon Thy servant Francis the sacred marks of our redemption.") At the word "here," two of the friars point to the stone in front of the high altar, which marks the exact spot where St Francis knelt when he received the sacred stigmata.

On that rainy day in May when I arrived at Mount Alverna, the afternoon procession was long over; so I begged the guest-master, when he returned to find me once more in dry attire, to have me called before Matins the next morning. I wished this particularly, because I was not sure whether I could spend another night on the mountain.

While we were talking about this

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

matter, two other Fathers came into the guest-room ; one of them introduced himself to me as the Father Guardian, Father Saturnino da Caprese ; the other was one of the Franciscans recently expelled from France, by name Father Samuel—or as the Italians, with their fondness for doubling the final consonant, called him, Samuelle. The Father Guardian withdrew almost immediately ; but when Padre Samuel discovered that I could speak French, he was delighted, and sat some time talking to me. Finally he promised to call me at night in time for the procession.

The fear of being too late, however, made me so uneasy that I woke of myself long before the time. As early as one o'clock I started up, and in the pitch darkness groped about for the lucifer matches on the table by my bedside. I struck one : it spluttered,

PILGRIM WALKS

smoked, threw out sparks, and burned with a blue flame; at last I contrived to light a candle with it.

I did not dare to trust myself to go to sleep again. I left the candle burning; its faint light only made more perceptible the darkness of the large, deathly cold room. And while I lay there in the intense loneliness and intense silence, not hearing even the patter of the rain outside, an appalling dread took possession of me—a dread worse than the dread of death—the most awful fear that can weigh an unhappy mortal to the ground: the fear lest he should, after all, not be the friend of God. Why, I asked myself, should this fear fall upon me here of all places—at La Verna, whither I had so often longed to direct my pilgrim steps? Then a voice answered me—a harsh, hard, ugly voice, one which I had heard

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

before, and in which there was not the least accent of sympathy: "Dost thou not know that there are individuals to whom God gives all in this world because He can give them nothing in the next—lets them have their will here because there is no joy for them hereafter? And if a man finds pleasure in pilgrimages and religious feelings, in pious thoughts and the relics of saints, God grants his desires and allows him to enjoy the sweets of piety, as others enjoy art, honours, or dissipation. Such a one is not really nearer to God than they are, nor has he a better title to heaven—"

The loud, sharp notes of a bell interrupted my gloomy musings. I got up, dressed quickly, and went into the corridor outside my room. A little farther on I came to a flight of stairs, which took me down into a yard. There I struck a match, and by its

PILGRIM WALKS

feeble, uncertain light I saw—or thought I saw—a few steps off, a huge creature, a gigantic bulldog or mastiff, standing motionless, ready to fall upon me. Without uttering a sound, I quickly retreated, the same hateful voice whispering in my ear: “That is the Evil One waiting for thee.” But now I heeded not the voice. I regained my cell, and quietly fetched my candle. I went up the stairs: was there a way out above? I only got into an attic full of all manner of rubbish.

Then I began to explore the corridor slowly and systematically. First of all I put a chair to the door to keep it open; for there was no latch outside, only a keyhole without a key. I knocked at all the doors in the corridor, but received no answer. On the opposite side there was nothing but windows giving on to the courtyard. At last, at the far

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

end of the corridor, I found a little door which was evidently the way out. Alas! it too was locked. In vain I shook it. I was locked in, a helpless prisoner.

Then the bells rang out for the second time, a prolonged, joyous peal. I thought despairingly: "Now the procession will start and I shall not be there to see it. They have forgotten me; or perhaps, in mistaken kindness, left me to sleep, thinking I can go with them the next night. But I have not time to stay another night, and so I shall have to go away without having attained my object." Despair gave me strength. I rattled the door furiously, and knocked till I woke the echoes. No doubt the friars were all in the church and could not hear me. And there were the bells again for the third time! How musical, how happy they sounded! I leaned against the window,

PILGRIM WALKS

staring out into the dark night; not the faintest streak of dawn was visible.

All at once I saw a light in the windows of the opposite building. The light moved. There was evidently some one over there carrying a candle, coming nearer; for one window after another in my direction was lighted up. Soon I saw a figure walking along the corridor which must lead to the locked door behind which I was standing. My heart leaped with joy. They had not forgotten me: they were, after all, coming to fetch me.

I heard a key rattle on the other side of the door, a bolt was drawn back, and on the threshold stood little Father Samuel, smiling and kind, his spectacles glittering in the candlelight. "I am not too late?" I asked anxiously. The good Father seemed somewhat surprised to find me in such a hurry. "By no means," he answered; "there is plenty

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

of time. We have only just finished Matins, then come Lauds, and the procession is not until they are ended."

"There is plenty of time!" What a relief for me to hear that! I followed him in silence through the long, dark passages. When we got to a high door with iron clamps, he blew out the candle and we entered the church. It was so cold that I shivered.

The lofty, vaulted roof was lost in shadow. Behind the high altar, the apse was brilliantly lighted. The friars were reciting the Office in the usual manner, on one note, in measured time. I listened a while, and presently caught the words of the *Benedicite*. My agitation subsided, my fears were calmed as the praises of the Almighty God, ever reiterated, fell on my ear. Other equally beautiful psalms of praise followed; then came the *Benedictus*, at

PILGRIM WALKS

the close of which a lay-brother came out of the choir and went down the church with a lantern. He threw the doors wide open, and from behind the altar the procession issued slowly. First two lanterns were carried, swinging from high poles. Then followed in long succession the friars in their brown habits, walking two and two. I counted them: there were thirty-seven in all. I joined the procession. Some one in front began to recite the fiftieth psalm: *Miserere mei Deus*. The voices of the others arose in response: *Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitatem meam*—words which found an echo in my heart.

By this time we had reached the church door. The boundless night outside—the grey, fog-laden night—lay like a shroud on the broad, bleak, lonely landscape. The wind blew on us

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

icily cold ; the fog rolled like waves of vapour in the light of the lanterns. But we soon turned away from the dark night, and entered the covered way on the right. The long line of friars walked on quickly before me, their shadows fitting over the dark, cold walls.

When the *Miserere* was ended, the *De Profundis* was recited. Meanwhile we had got to a trellised door in the right wall of the passage, and on going down a few steps came into the ante-chamber of the Chapel of the Stigmata. A kneeling-chair was placed for me exactly before the entrance to the chapel, within which the brothers had already taken their places, filling the choir stalls and some kneeling on the steps of the altar. Above them was an altarpiece in blue and white, a copy of a Crucifixion by Della Robbia.

The service in the chapel was quite

PILGRIM WALKS

short. The antiphon, as I expected, was chanted; then followed a few minutes of silent prayer; after this one of the friars began to intone a litany, and each and all prostrated full length before the altar and kissed the ground. Then we returned to the church, the litany being recited meanwhile.

When it was ended, Father Samuel came and conducted me out. As the door closed behind me I heard a noise in the church: the brothers were beginning to scourge themselves. The good French Father left me at the door of my room, after wishing me courteously, "*Bonne nuit!*" It was nearly two o'clock. I went to bed again, and slept soundly until eight.

While I was asleep, a beautiful, bright, spring morning had dawned, flooding Mount Alverna with golden light. From the little terrace in front

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

of the church and convent I could see outspread a wide panorama of wild, picturesque scenery. Leaning over the edge of the parapet, one could look down into an abyss of wet rocks; and far, far below them lay the verdant fields, with huge boulders here and there. Those were the open fields I had crossed on the previous evening, in the pelting rain, on my way to Mount Alverna. I could trace the road by which I had come.

But when I looked upward I saw nothing, only mountains all around. The nearer ones were of a yellowish brown colour; the distant ones were purple, flecked with brown, black, and green. The line of mountains, peak after peak, trending away to the blue horizon, resembled a petrified sea, with waves of varied colours. Bibbiena lay far down below; and the mountains

PILGRIM WALKS

which I had climbed yesterday on my way hither looked like mere ant-hills. The prospect was boundless—boundless as the heavens above it.

It was Sunday, and the country people had come up to hear Mass. Round about on the terrace stood groups of honest peasants conversing in a low voice, rosy-cheeked women, smiling children. Not one of them came up to the stranger to beg; only one old woman approached me and began to talk. She was from a distance—from Castel Fiorentino, a town on the other side of the Appennines. “Yes,” she observed, “here on this mountain St Francis suffered so much, did so much penance. We too must suffer and do penance if we would hope ever to go to paradise.”

Presently up came Father Samuel, fresh and bright as the morning,

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

although (as indeed was usual) he had not taken any rest since the procession. Under his escort I visited every spot hallowed by association with St Francis : the cave where he prayed, the other cave where he slept, and finally, high up on the mountain, the grotto in which Brother Leo was accustomed to say Mass for his master and spiritual father.

While, after a long and difficult descent, we stood for a time in silence at the bottom of the dark, damp ravine, between gigantic walls of rock, where St Francis abode, I could not refrain from saying that I could not imagine any one living in such a spot, and very often exposed to such weather as we had had yesterday.

“True,” Father Samuel answered, “the climate of La Verna is very inclement for the greater part of the year. We have three, or at the most four,

PILGRIM WALKS

months of summer; during the rest of the year snow, rain, fog, and storms. I have heard visitors who came from Assisi say that what they had seen there is not to be compared with what we have here. Assisi is lovely, pleasing, delightful; there our Institute is seen in its fairest growth. But here one sees where its roots are struck, the depths out of which it cries to God. Here its aspect is indeed appalling; nothing less can be said of it."

Ascending by a narrow flight of steps between colossal masses of rock, we reached Brother Leo's cell, which is light and airy. At the farthest end is a small altar, before which there is room for only the officiating priest to stand.

"I said Mass up here once," observed Father Samuel, as if in answer to my yet unspoken question. "It was on a summer morning, exactly at the hour

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

of sunrise. Just as I made the Sign of the Cross before beginning, the crimson beams of the sun shone out over yonder mountain—Monte Casella. And when I turned to say the *Dominus vobiscum*, what a glorious sight the wide landscape presented—the sun's rays darting forth to dispel the morning mist! I was so overcome by the thought of God's greatness that I scarcely dared to take His name upon my lips; and every time that I came to the word *Dominus* or *Deus* in the Mass I hesitated and trembled, like the children of Israel at the foot of Sinai; and I banished every thought of earth out of my mind, as Moses put his shoes from off his feet in the presence of the burning bush. Of a truth, this is indeed the place to say, *Sursum corda!*—'Lift up your hearts!'"

As we descended the slope he

PILGRIM WALKS

continued: "Yes, La Verna is called the Franciscan Calvary, and justly so; for the Crucifixion was renewed, repeated in a marvellous manner, on Francis' body. It might also be called our Thabor, the Mount of Transfiguration; for truly Francis was never so near heaven as during those lonely hours on Mount Alverna. It is easier for us weak little ones to follow him to Thabor than to Calvary.

"St Francis loved this mountain more than any other. He was one who attached himself to places; and from no spot did he take leave with such emotion as from Mount Alverna when he quitted it for the last time. You have not seen his touching words of farewell? Then I will read them to you this afternoon. They are very beautiful. We read them in the refectory every year on the 30th of

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

September, the anniversary of his departure hence; and however often one has heard that farewell, it always touches one anew."

The morning hours sped quickly; the time for the High Mass drew near, and we turned our steps toward the church. It was the feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross, a suitable day to be celebrated on Mount Alverna. After the Mass I dined with a bright-eyed young peasant, little more than a boy, who had come to La Verna "*per farsi frate*,"—to become a Franciscan lay-brother. He was soon to exchange his secular clothes for the brown habit and cowl.

After dinner I climbed the mountain above the monastery; *la penna* it is called; the summit reaches the same height as Vesuvius. There the mountain is thickly wooded. On the extreme verge are some majestic beeches, below

PILGRIM WALKS

which the grey rock was carpeted with blue anemones, yellow cowslips, and small purple hyacinths. In the interior of the wood the ravines are shaded by a thick growth of Scotch firs (*pinus silvestris*). The clouds, which had looked threatening, began to roll away over the majestic mountains; and the sun shone with such heat—almost summer heat—that the ground was dry enough for me to sit down upon a rock. There I remained until the bells rang for Vespers.

After Vespers the second procession of the day wended its way to the Chapel of the Stigmata, with a longer following, but without the impressive solemnity of the nocturnal one. Psalms were not recited as they were in the night, but the arched roof of the long corridor rang again with the hymn :

Crucis Christi mons Alvernæ

Recenset mysteria—

IN FRANCISCAN ITALY

“Behold on Mount Alverna’s height
Christ’s Cross revealed to mortal sight.”

Towards evening I went in search of Father Samuel, to remind him of his promise to read me St Francis’ farewell. It was a transcript of the original document, which is written on parchment, penned by Brother Masseo, and preserved in the reliquary of the monastery. After reading it, the good Father talked to me for a long time—or rather delivered a discourse on the intense love of the Saint for God—a love which, for God’s sake, he extended to all his creatures. At last he pulled himself up, saying :

“But, my dear sir, here I sit and let my tongue run on, quite forgetting how tired you must be. You will pardon me, I am sure. I so seldom have an opportunity of speaking my own language, it makes me almost feel as

PILGRIM WALKS

if you were a fellow-countryman. What time do you start to-morrow morning? At five o'clock? Very well. At half-past four I shall be in the church to say my Mass, so that you may not leave without that blessing."

Thereupon he bade me a hearty good-night. Soon I was alone in my cell. I went to the window. The sky was overcast, the beeches and firs of La Verna were silhouetted black against the grey heavens. I stood a long time looking out. This, then, was the end, the happy end, of my pilgrimage, by which, starting from Rome, passing through the vale of Rieti, through Assisi and Cortona, I had reached Mount Alverna—the pilgrimage which had led me from the Crib at Greccio to the mystic Crucifixion on La Verna.

This book is DUE on the last
date stamped below.

DISCHARGE-URL
NOV 22 1958

FEB 15 1960
FEB 20 1980

UC Southern Regional Library Facility



A 000 523 944 7

BX
3637
J59p

